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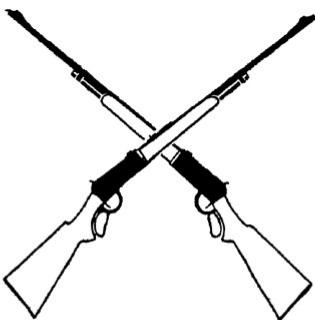
**HUNTING
AMERICAN LIONS**

By the Author

THE LOST AMERICANS

HUNTING AMERICAN LIONS

HUNTING AMERICAN LIONS



FRANK C. HIBBEN

Illustrated by Paul Bransom

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*To those immortals of the trail, Keeno,
Old Red, Bugger, Buck, and Drive, all
gone to the heaven where exciting smells
drift over canine Elysian Fields, this book,
largely of their doings, is affectionately
dedicated.*

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HUNTING AMERICAN LIONS

CHAPTER I

BEN LILLY

MANY of my friends had told me not to see the old man at all. "He's bushed and he's dangerous," they said. "He talks to imaginary dogs, and he sees people that aren't there."

I went out to the ranch near Silver City, New Mexico, nevertheless, and found old Ben Lilly. The pale blue of his eyes, as we shook hands, disturbed me. They were calm blue eyes, with all of the sadness of a man who had lived a solitary and lonely life. It was the blue eyes you noticed first and the round and wrinkled face afterward. His white hair had not been cut for many months and hung down over his ears and forehead like a forkful of hay. His cheeks were pink and he seemed to radiate still latent energy. If Ben Lilly was as sick as I had been told, his appearance gave no indication of it.

But I felt uncomfortable in his presence. His placid look had an air of inquiry about it, as though he constantly expected me to say something.

"Lions, young man? I expect it's panthers you mean. I've killed a heap of them." It was obvious that Ben wasn't talking to me, for he never again glanced in my direction, nor even seemed to sense my presence at all. He went right on talking, ignoring my questions and making no effort to stay close to me or make sure that I had heard. We simply started walking from the spot where I had first met him and kept on walking. We were gone three days.

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I had not come to see Ben Lilly on any casual visit. There was a compelling purpose in my questions. This old lion and bear hunter was the first from whom I hoped to learn much. This was the initiation of a project making a study of the mountain lion.

A career is doing what you want to do and then finding someone to pay you for it. I managed to be fortunate enough to discover just this proposition. In 1934 and 1935 I was offered a position hunting lions. A group called the Southwestern Conservation League, centered at Albuquerque, New Mexico, professed themselves extremely interested in the mountain lion, both as a natural and scientific study. This group of far-seeing gentlemen expressed concern that this most colorful of American animals was becoming greatly reduced in numbers with little or no knowledge concerning them. Mountain lions, which formerly ranged all of North America, from Canada southward, were now to be found in only small fragments of their former range, for the most part in the rugged mountains of our western states. Mountain lions still exist in the rank fastnesses of the Everglades of Florida and in the comparatively untouched wilderness of Central Mexico. It was only in such wild spots that I might yet find enough lions to get a comprehensive story of their life and habits.

The Southwestern Conservation League furnished me a car, a horse and a horse-trailer to set out on the lion trail. My pockets bulged with letters of introduction to the various professional lion hunters of the Southwest with whom I might hunt to gain the information which I desired. My instructions were comprehensive and adaptable to whatever exigencies might arise. "Find out all you can about lions," was all that they told me. The project was to take twelve months.

Actually, I must confess, the enthusiasm with which I prepared my equipment and started forth on this strange quest was not entirely the zeal to learn. The hunting fever had seized me, fanning my efforts to a pitch of anticipation. The cry of hunting hounds was ringing in my ears as I started out. The prospect of spending a whole year on the lion trail seemed like a dream come true. In the ensuing months I learned much of the American cougar. On some hundreds of lion trails with the most

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famous hunters in the business, I came to know the mountain lion for what he is—one of the most fascinating and interesting animals in our whole repertoire.

But as I asked my first questions and sought a place to begin, the answer was always the same. "If you want information about lions, go to Ben Lilly. He is the dean of lion hunters." Ranchers, forest rangers, old hunters all replied to my questions: "Ask Ben Lilly; he knows more than anyone else."

They also told me something of the fabulous Ben Lilly. They recounted stories of how he left money in banks all over Texas and New Mexico and never kept any accounting of it. He wrote checks on scraps of wrapping paper or an old fragment of bone. These ranchers told me how "Mr. Lilly," as they called him, even behind his back, slept and ate with his dogs like an animal and followed the track of a lion or bear with the tenacity of a terrier. This legendary hunter had made a living all over the West hunting animals for stockmen who wished to be rid of a noxious predator.

The opinion of all informed persons was unanimous. My investigation of mountain lions would have to start with Ben Lilly for all his peculiarities.

But as I started out that morning by the side of the venerable old hunter, I wondered if I was not too late. Before we had gone a few hundred yards it became obvious that a young cowboy of whom I had asked directions in Silver City was right. Ben Lilly was "as nutty as a fruit cake." My first adventure on my lion investigation was not to be with lions at all, but with a crazed old man.

He talked quietly as we walked along. Even sights and scenes full of the baying of hounds and the excitement of the chase seemed not to change his emotional status at all. He recited the events and painted the scenes of his past with complete complacence. Although he spoke of panthers and bears by the hundred, the story which he wove with his unconscious words was the story of himself, certainly one of the most remarkable lives that has ever been lived.

About fifty years ago, Ben had had a wife and three children back in Louisiana. There Ben had killed his first bear with a pocket knife, and with its blood had acquired the lust for kill-

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ing. You could scarcely believe, as you looked into his gentle blue eyes, that he had in his lifetime killed several thousands of bears and several hundreds of mountain lions—far more than any other living hunter. Ben was a marvelous shot. He could shoot a lion through the paw in the top of a pine tree and then shoot the animal again through the heart as it fell end over end through the branches to the ground.

When his wife, to whom he referred as a “daughter of Gomorrah,” thrust a rifle into his hand on a Louisiana morning many years ago, she told him that if he must hunt and shoot, he could at least go out and kill a hawk that was bothering her chickens. Ben didn’t come back from his wife’s errand for almost three years. His explanation was that “the hawk just kept going.” During that time he scoured the Louisiana canebrakes as a solitary soul hunting he knew not what. Each bear that he killed seemed only to make him avid to track down and kill another. It was the same insatiable longing that some find in the absorbing accumulation of money. It is an inner urge to discover the fullness of life which is never full. With Ben Lilly the urge lasted a lifetime and was the death of many an unsuspecting animal.

As Ben Lilly talked and walked, he revealed more than once that he regarded himself as a wild animal. He was one of them and by a queer paradox he revealed far more feeling for several of the individual lions he had killed than for any human being he mentioned. He spoke several times of “my friend, Narrow-neck,” which was a lion he had killed in the Mogollon Mountains many years ago. He also told of a litter of lion kittens which he had fostered after he had killed their mother. He fed the kittens on milk and cared for them the best he could, only to kill them too, when they reached mature size.

“Panthers don’t get along with us,” he said in half-explanation. It seemed that Ben Lilly regarded himself as a policeman of the wild. He was a self-appointed leavener of nature. Certain animals—bears and lions to be specific—were endowed by their very nature with a capacity to wreak evil. They couldn’t help it, but evil they were and should be destroyed. Ben Lilly several times referred to panthers as the “Cains” of the animal world. They were slayers and should be killed in their turn.

During a momentary pause in his running recital, as we

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stopped for breath on a little ledge high above the river, I asked him if he thought that all bears and mountain lions should be killed, every one. He didn't answer my question for three hours, nor give any indication that he had heard me in all of that time.

"A man has to be accepted into the family," he said, quite irrelevantly. "You can't live with them and you can't hunt them if you aren't a member." Apparently Ben Lilly meant, as I gathered from his later remarks, that he regarded himself as a full-fledged member in the community of wild animals. He professed quite simply to speaking the language which the wild understood. He recounted how he had addressed a bear which was brought to bay on a rock. Just before he drove his hunting knife, tied to a long pole, into the bear's side, Ben Lilly addressed his victim in a courtroom manner. "You are condemned, you black devil. I kill you in the name of the law." And the bear answered: "I cannot escape and I die."

This verbal persiflage with animals dying and otherwise punctuated Ben Lilly's account many times. I had the distinct feeling that he talked with animals more easily than with men and that if I had been one of his lion dogs, I would have learned even more.

It goes without saying that his ideal was the wild. The ways of people and of towns he understood practically not at all. The vast majority of his life he had spent on the trail, always by himself, accompanied by animals. After three days, with the half-demented old man, I was convinced that he could talk with animals. Even now I am not certain that he can't.

As we climbed the rocky trails above the lowlands ever farther back into the brushy hills, I wondered where we were going. I had made no preparations for an extended trip nor even thought we were going for more than a walk. I hadn't brought with me so much as a bag of lunch as supplies for any kind of a trip into the mountains.

Ben Lilly in spite of his age, and seemingly feeble condition, climbed steadily and talked as he climbed. The farther we got away from the scattered ranches, and the wilder the country became, the more he seemed to fit with his surroundings. Where I had first met him, with his back against an adobe wall, he had appeared what he really was—a broken and dying, half-crazed,

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old hunter who had been on his last chase. Now as we paced along a cow trail between the piñon and juniper hills, he seemed to suck new life from the odor of the woods around us.

The farther we went, the lighter was his step. He swung his head from side to side as he moved among the trees, as though taking the wind. His actions indeed seemed animal-like, and his pale blue eyes read at a glance every detail of the trail and the rocks and the earth around us. This was his element; he was indeed a part of it. Every bird that flitted past, every ground squirrel, seemed to know him and to recognize him for one of themselves. I was the outsider.

But fortunately the old man seemed unaware of my presence, although he kept up a steady run of talk. I had the feeling that he usually talked out loud to himself when he was on the trail in the woods, and that I just happened to be there by sheer chance. It also began to dawn on me that Ben Lilly hadn't the slightest intention of returning to his ranch home near Silver City, and that I was on the trail with him certainly for the day, and almost certainly for the night that would follow. A shiver of apprehension spread over me in spite of the hot sun.

Ben Lilly was at this moment describing with lucid, gory detail, a grizzly bear hunt in the state of Coahuila, Mexico. "Old man Sanborn set me on him. They was grizzlies, four of them, and I tracked them down by myself and killed them. They was desert bears, light colored with a stripe down their back, but desert or mountain, they didn't get away and I killed the four of them, brought their skins back to Sanborn. Skins don't matter, it's the meat that counts."

I became so intrigued with these bits of philosophy that Ben Lilly wove into his discourse that I almost forgot my apprehensions at being alone with him and so far away from my base. He told in several ways, just as he had with the Mexican grizzly bears, that he could see the interiors of animals and men through their skins. Indeed those penetrating blue eyes of the old man might have X-ray vision.

He scoffed at the idea of keeping the skins of wild animals he had killed. "The skins only cover the meat," he said more than once, and implied that if you kept only the skin, you didn't have anything at all. Apparently the exteriors of animals, and the

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clothes of men were simply shabby coverings to hide what was beneath. A really perceiving person could penetrate this exterior disguise. Certainly no one would keep the skin of an animal after he had hunted him down, any more than we would keep the clothes of a dead man. Of the thousands of animals that Ben Lilly had killed he had never kept a single skin for himself.

Although Ben Lilly spoke about people much less than he did about lions, it became apparent that his opinion of most people was very low. He felt rather sorry for them, being confined in houses and in towns where the air was "rancid." He said that the people there in that part of New Mexico where he was staying during his aging years "never took their place."

I had listened to the babble of Mister Lilly for many hours before I realized what he meant. It became increasingly obvious that the old hunter thought that the few people whom he knew did not take their legitimate place in the scheme of wild things. They didn't fit with the birds and the squirrels that he knew so well. They were not a part of the community. Here was this old man, more solitary, more lonely, more peculiar than anyone I'd ever met before, feeling sorry for me and for other humans because we had not been accepted into the wild community.

Ben Lilly pointed out that there were so many buzzing distractions in a town that a man could never find himself as he could in the solitude and loneliness of the woods and mountains. There with the animals amid the trees and ledges the soul and personality of a person can develop. It is only in such surroundings that a man can learn enough to become a member of the community. It became obvious as the afternoon wore on that Ben Lilly and I were traveling as fast as our legs could carry us and the roughness of the trail would permit, from my community into his.

It was late in the afternoon and we had by this time covered eight or ten miles of the rugged, dry terrain of the foothills. The old hunter seemed to be showing his infirmity for the first time since we started. His breath came in whistling gasps and his talk dwindled to a few disconnected sentences.

It was during one of these remarks that he stopped in the midst of a potent bit of philosophy that would have done credit to Thoreau. He stooped forward at a little bend in the trail with

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a quick movement as though he had found a valuable coin among the pine needles. He pointed a weather-beaten hand at an indistinct track or depression which he seemed to see. As before he was pointing more to assure himself than to mark out anything for me to see. "He's here again," he muttered beneath his breath, and started off diagonally away from the trail with a new burst of energy. He half ran, always bending forward and with both hands extended as though his fingertips were sensitive to what he hoped to see. He apparently was following a trail which only he could make out, imprinted here and there in the dust and debris on the forest floor. From time to time he pushed his battered old black sombrero back on his head and wiped his ruddy brow with one sleeve. After each of these momentary halts he started off again, sure of himself for a few yards, then hesitating once more.

I had seen dogs trail this way when the track was difficult, but Ben Lilly didn't appear to be looking at any particular place on the ground in front of him. It seemed as though some sixth sense were guiding him more unerringly than the scent of a keen-nosed hound. The worst of it was I could see no track, nor any consecutive series of prints that would indicate that we were following a heavy animal through these wild hills. I judged from Ben Lilly's reputation and from his peculiar actions that we were following a bear or a panther, but we had no hounds with which to track down the scent and we had no gun to shoot the animal if we caught up with him. I had heard marvelous stories of Ben Lilly, but never in my wildest expectations did I visualize a grizzled old man who followed a lion track on pine needles unaided by any dog.

The whole process seemed so bizarre, so out of keeping with anything that smacked of reality or real life that I ventured one of my rare questions when Ben Lilly paused again as though in doubt over which way to go. "What are we after, Mr. Lilly?" Those penetrating blue eyes seemed to bore through me with an almost hostile air as though he had suddenly become aware of my presence in his forbidden hunting territory. Every time I looked into those eyes they astounded me. Their mildness was deceiving. The placid expression which they habitually wore concealed an inner man which few if any knew. The tenacity, the stubborn-

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ness, the lust for the kill—all of these properties were there, but invisible.

In this case, in those far-off hills with the shadows of the afternoon slanting long across the trees on the slope where we stood, the eyes looked almost frightening. I had the momentary fleeting thought that the next time the old man turned his back I would slip away and make my way back to town somehow. Ben Lilly was a madman and was following a phantom lion track into unknown places.

In those seconds when the old hunter's eyes seemed to look at me as if I were the hunted, Ben Lilly seemed to recall who I was and why I had come. "It's him. He lives here," he answered enigmatically and turned once more to follow the interrupted track.

I fell in behind him and followed step for step. When he swung his head with his shaggy white hair bulging from beneath his old hat, I swung my head too. When he dropped to one knee to examine the ground I looked there also. If I were to learn the lore of the wild, here was a wild man who could teach me.

In this manner then, we traveled across one mountain slope after another, through a low saddle and down into a brushy canyon ringed around by ledges of reddish stone. We followed these ledges and rims in the gathering twilight to where a side gully cut precipitously through in a shadowy black scar filled with brush and tangled bushes. Old Man Lilly was shuffling along the bare rock on the edge of this little side canyon. He threw back his head so that the sun showed red upon his cheeks and the tip of his nose. As I looked at him from the side, he appeared like an old Dutch burgher who had perhaps taken too much ale. The ruddiness of his complexion radiated good humor and the joy of living.

But Old Ben Lilly, in spite of the jovial outlines of his fascinating face was not radiating good humor, at least to the things of the wild. He was still half-crouched forward and was swinging his head from side to side. He was taking the wind. He was sniffing like any hunting dog, scenting a covey of quail. He uttered a single grunt which sounded like some noise of satisfaction or Ben Lilly's equivalent of "I thought so all the time."

He dropped down below the little ledge of rocks and ran back

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and forth for a few steps in brushy gully beneath. It was so dark among the bushes that it seemed that even he could find no tracks, no matter how plain they might be. In a moment Ben Lilly was pulling something from beneath a big cedar. It was the leg of a deer, attached by a ragged and torn strip of skin to the rest of the carcass. There was the head of the deer beneath the leaves. It was a buck with stubby horns in velvet.

I could see now in the gloom that the animal had been covered with leaves and sticks beneath the overhanging tree. I could make out the long sweeps and scrapes of some mighty paw that had gathered up this leafy debris to cover the dead deer. The stomach of the animal was eaten clear away with portions of the bowels and viscera torn and bloody. This close, I too could smell the stench of the dead animal which Ben Lilly's keen nostrils had caught on the ledge above. This was a lion kill. It was the first one I had seen, but there could be no doubt of what it was. I had heard that lions cover their meat after they have eaten a meal, and the old man had followed some dim track to this very carcass. If there had been any doubt as to the author of this venison tragedy, I saw the tooth marks and the raking gashes of deep-bitten claws on the neck and shoulder of the dead buck. It was a lion kill and made by the same lion whose trail we had followed to the spot.

The old panther hunter had whipped out a folding clasp knife of gigantic size and was pulling off the sticks and leaves that adhered to the haunch of venison which he held in his hand. With the gleaming knife he trimmed the torn and putrid skin and dried blood from the top of the leg. He sniffed critically at the clean surface which he had revealed. Again he gave that inarticulate grunt of satisfaction and swung the deer leg to his shoulder. It was almost dark as we climbed out of the brushy little gully and started up a hogback toward the main ridge above us.

The old man seemed vastly pleased with himself and started in again a running line of talk, only part of which I could hear as I climbed behind him. "He always goes through that saddle," the old hunter was saying as we topped out over the ridge. "Panthers always go the same way."

I didn't realize what a remarkable piece of tracking I had

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witnessed, however, until I too had followed many lion trails and tried my own hand at this hunting business. It also did not occur to me until much later just how strange and peculiar the whole day had been. We had started off without any preparation or supplies. We had headed for an unknown destination which we had never reached. We had followed a phantom lion track which I never saw. We had a haunch of venison without firing a shot or without even carrying a gun. On this whole ludicrous hunt I had been with a white-haired old man whom everybody had told me was mad. I certainly had entered a world which few had ever seen.

Scattered clouds obscured the southwestern stars as we dropped down over the main ridge. I could see the old man looking like a hunchback with the deer leg on his shoulder outlined for a moment against the twilight arc of the sky. Only by his running talk could I keep track of him in the darkness at all, and yet he seemed on familiar ground and went as fast as he had in the full daylight in spite of his age. He dropped down below an outcropping ledge on the slope of the ridge and I heard the haunch of venison hit the leaves as he threw it down. While I stood, wondering where we were, he scraped together a few leaves and sticks and struck a match. By the light of the tiny flame again that benign face of his was brought into relief. The sight of those ruddy features again reassured me. Pitch blackness and a mad man are an awesome combination.

As the little fire leaped up through the dry branches that the old man heaped upon it, I could see that we were at the mouth of an overhanging ledge or shallow cave. As the flames grew higher and brightened, I could see also that this cave had been visited before. An old pair of gray trousers hung on a ledge at the rear. The stump of a blackened and wax-spattered candle was mounted on a projection above my head. There were two or three old bags that seemed to contain food, and two flour sacks tied and piled one on top of the other. Ben Lilly had lived and hunted here before.

At that moment the old hunter was pulling a battered and bent old skillet out from under the leaves at the back of the cave. With clean strokes he whittled off sections of venison from the deer leg by the fire. In a few moments there was the smell of

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roasting meat and the reflected cheerful warmth of the campfire on rocky walls. Here was comfort indeed.

We ate in silence the slabs of venison and gouts of thin oatmeal which Ben Lilly had extracted from one of the bags on the rocky ledge. There were no sugar, no cream and no leavener but a handful of dirty salt, but the meal tasted delicious. I was amazed at the amount that the old hunter could eat. Slab after slab of the red venison disappeared through his scraggly beard. Without saying so, he seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. I had the distinct feeling that I was the excuse for his going on this excursion which suited his likes very well. It pleased me to think that the old man was having such a good time after he had been in town and among civilized buildings which he obviously hated.

Supper done, Old Ben Lilly, then about eighty years of age, simply lay back in the dried leaves by the edge of the fire and was soon snoring contentedly. There was nothing for me to do but follow his example. I was surprised at how well I slept and how comfortable we were.

The next morning I was awakened by the sound of frying meat. The old hunter was hunched over the fire as before, cooking slabs of the stuff in the bent skillet. He voiced no word of greeting nor gave any indication that he remembered I was with him. He simply shoved the old skillet toward me for my share of the meat. Before I could eat, however, I had to have water, not only to wash the wood smoke out of my eyes, but for a long drink, as we had had none since the afternoon before. I started off down the ridge toward the canyon below and did not come back for an hour.

When I returned, Old Man Lilly was seated in the leaves with his back against the rocky ledge. He was reading a small and battered Bible which I had not seen before. I ate my breakfast in silence. The old man did not look up, but muttered to himself occasionally as though he were reading half aloud.

That whole day we sat there in the leaves by the ledge. The white-haired old man never looked at me for the whole time, as far as I can remember. He mumbled to himself occasionally and repeated passages half out loud, seemingly deriving intense satisfaction from mouthing the words. From time to time he

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turned the dog-eared pages of the little book with an ostentatious flourish.

As before, I was afraid to question him and especially so since he seemed so absorbed in the Bible. As the hours wore on, I fidgeted in the leaves beside the dead fire. Again the thought struck me that it would be better if I took the back trail and left this crazed old hunter to his solitude and his Bible. I had stood up and paced back and forth for the tenth time when the old man, without looking up from his page and seemingly as a part of the biblical verse he was reading said sternly "Sit down, young man, it's Sunday."

To my certain knowledge it was Saturday and not Sunday, for we had started out on this memorable trip on a Friday. Unless I had somehow, like Alice in Wonderland, lost an odd day, Ben Lilly was mistaken. The ranchers had told me that even as a young man the hunter would not follow the chase on Sunday. If his dogs treed a lion or a bear, they had to keep it there until Monday morning. Ben Lilly was scrupulous in his observance of Sunday. He would neither hunt, nor shoot, nor travel on the Seventh Day.

In this case Ben Lilly's Sunday and my Saturday was passed in almost complete silence. I heartily wished that the old man had read the biblical verses out loud so that I might have joined him spiritually. As the day wore on I seemed to achieve at least a small measure of that complete satisfaction with solitude that seemed to be a hallmark of Ben Lilly, the hunter. There was not a single distracting sight or sound in this wild spot. None of the world's troubles seemed to reach this far. There is no doubt that the aged hunter had found a solution for complete peace which few have achieved.

That night we slept as before and in the morning arose with the dawn. It was cold and with a few cloud wisps against the rising sun. Ben Lilly was talkative again and as we prepared our breakfast of venison and oatmeal, he kept up a running line of talk as he had when I first met him. He told stories of bear hunts and lion chases all over the west. He told of being lured from range to range, from one state to another by constant tales of bigger and more numerous bears and panthers. He had hired out to many ranchers to hunt down predatory animals in their

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sections. Apparently he had made a good deal of money in his life, but had certainly spent very little. But it was never the pay that attracted him. It was ever the constant lure of the hunt.

We came down out of the low mountains by a different ridge and a different trail. Even with the path slanting ever downward the old man seemed more faltering than he had been on the previous trip. He stumbled frequently and shuffled his feet and it seemed as though his knees could hardly bend. I sincerely hoped that I could do as well when I had reached my eightieth year.

There seemed nothing wrong with his thought processes, however; and, if he were mad, he was mad in a fixed direction. His every thought and mental track seemed to be of hunting and the wild. It was all he knew, but he knew that more thoroughly, more intimately than any other I have ever met.

As we paused in the shade of a tree on a rock point, the old man told me confidentially that he had written two books. I told him I would be very much complimented if he would let me read them, admitting that I too wrote on occasion if I could find anything interesting to write about. He took out the old Bible with which he had spent the previous day, and opening it withdrew a single sheet of brown paper, a torn bit of the wrapping of some package or other. There was a single line written in a bold hand on the wrinkled scrap. "Panthers is uncommon cautious," I read. That was all. Ben Lilly returned the folded bit to its place beneath the cover of his Bible with the air of one who had let me see a great treasure. We started on again down the mountain.

As we reached the ranch, late in the afternoon, we shook hands and parted. Old Ben Lilly seemed hardly to see me as he turned away. His blue eyes were misty and had a faraway stare as though he saw clear through me to the Great Beyond.

He was not far distant from the hunting grounds where all of us go, for two years later, in the poorhouse on Silver Creek above Silver City, New Mexico, Ben Lilly the great hunter, died. He was alone at the end, unknown and misunderstood by any of the humans around him. The wilderness was his world, the wild things must have marked his passing.

As far as I know the hunt which I took with Ben Lilly was his last. It was one of my first, but certainly one I shall never forget.

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We tracked down no game and we fired no shot, but on that chase I learned more about lions than on any other subsequent hunt. Certainly it was on those three days with a half-mad old hunter that I caught the true spirit of the hunt. I was infected with a little of that energy and spirit that had brought Old Ben Lilly through a lifetime of tracking to the end of the trail.

CHAPTER II

HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED

HOMER was just pulling the mangled carcass out from underneath a pile of leaves and debris in the shadows. The deer had been a huge buck, and his horns had three arching prongs on either side that reached above his head in a graceful curve. But the once sleek gray body was now disheveled and spotted with dark streaks of blood and fragments of torn flesh. The belly was disemboweled and most of it gone, the frayed ends of the intestines trailing off into the dirt and pine needles. What had once been a vibrant, bounding animal of magnificent proportions was now a bloody carcass, almost shapeless and sickening to look upon.

Homer Pickens, then state lion hunter of New Mexico, was to be my second teacher after old Ben Lilly. Here was a man who radiated knowledge and good humor. Homer knew more than perhaps any other in the Southwest about lions and was one of the finest companions on the hunt I have ever known. Homer had seen bloody deer carcasses before.

“Lion kill,” Homer muttered as his dogs crowded around to sniff the torn remnants. “Look there”—Homer raised the buck’s head and neck by the antlers. I leaned closer over the stinking mess to see where he pointed at the back of the deer’s neck. There in the stiff gray hair was a round wound with the skin pulled back from the flesh like the red and gaping canthus of a

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sightless eye. At first it looked like the bullet hole of a heavy, penetrating ball. Then I saw there was another hole to match it on the other side of the deer's neck. They were tooth holes. Through the deer's skin and the green bone beneath, the lion had bitten with two long canine teeth that had met in the center and severed the spinal cord completely.

As Homer dropped the head of the lordly deer back on to the leaves, I could hear the ends of the shattered neck vertebrae grate together within the mangled flesh. What strength and skill it must have taken to kill a deer with horns the size of these! What power was contained in the jaws that could crush through two inches of hard bone and sinew as though it were punk wood!

Homer Pickens, the famous lion hunter, was already pointing out to me where the cougar had dragged the kill down the slope on which we stood. Even in southern New Mexico there were still, in that Mogollon winter, patches of crusted snow in the shadows of the brush and beneath the trees. Down through these areas of white was a black streak where the lion had dragged the deer to its present location. Here and there on the snow were still spots of darkened blood from the dead animal and tufts of deer hair scraped off on sharp-cornered rocks in the ground or the rough bark of the trees as he passed.

Homer and I followed the dark streak to its source where the patches of snow were spotted and stamped with deer hoofs and lion tracks all intermingled. The prints of the big cat were plain to see and seemed to lead from every direction. The tracks were round and showed the four plain toes and the three-lobed pad of the feline. Any backyard cat prints with his smaller feet a round miniature of these same tracks. Catlike the curved claws are sheathed when the lion walks or runs and are protruded only when used to arm the powerful paw in a lightning swift blow.

We had no trouble tracing the course of events in the patches of snow that remained. The buck deer, apparently with one other of his kind, had been browsing on some mountain mahogany bushes that grew in an opening on the hillside. There the lion had stalked them from the down-wind side. We could see the succession of tracks from his paws and the trough in the snow where he had dragged his great body along, belly to the ground. Here beneath an overhanging spruce where the snow was softer,

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was a fan-shaped imprint where the tip of that long tail had twitched back and forth in anticipation of the bloody venison that still grazed unharmed in the clearing ahead. Here also were the tracks where the great lion had leapt to his feet for the lightning dash and the kill. Well did the cougar know that he is the swiftest thing on four legs in the American woods. A hundred yards in three seconds is his speed, and if the lion gets close enough, the deer is as good as dead before his startled hoofs can make the first bound.

Here on the mountainside in New Mexico the same drama had occurred just as it had throughout the western mountains of America since prehistoric times. The deer's sharp hoofs had bitten deep into the half-frozen ground in a startled sideways leap. The running lion had jumped and found a purchase in the soft deerskin with raking claws and curved tooth. Then the long white fangs had closed like a trap on the deer's neck. It was done. The killer, as all of his carnivore ancestors before him, had stood with his forepaws on the fallen deer.

Homer and I could read what had happened as though we had seen it ourselves. There was the evidence on the torn and littered forest floor, where hoof and paw had stamped it out. That Mogollon lion had killed that Mogollon deer the day before Homer and I came with our hounds across that bloody business.

That was many years ago, but I remember it as vividly as though I saw the sight every day. It was the first real intimation that I had of the meaning of the word "lion." We of this civilization of cities seldom see the handiwork of the carnivore cats that still flourish in at least a few parts of the United States. It is a sight which takes us back many thousands of years to those cave days when our ancestors stumbled across such bloody carcasses commonly in their wild domains.

The ten lion hounds which we had brought with us for this lion hunting business were already circling wide around the deer kill to pick up the track. Somewhere from the center of this kill, a line of those round lion feet led out to point the direction where the cougar had meandered last. Invisible prints they were on the pine needles and rocks where they did not touch the snow patches, but on each spot where those round cat-feet had touched, a lingering whiff of pungent lion odor remained to be detected

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by the keen black noses of our lion hounds, trained for many years for just his purpose.

We could hear the dogs as their keen nostrils snuffled at every likely spot around us. Then Buck, a big tan-colored hound with the long trailing ears of his bloodhound ancestors, gave tongue in a long-drawn howl. His short-cut tail wagged furiously and the other dogs rushed to where he smelled in a space between two gigantic pine trees. Buck advanced several yards and barked again with his nose to the ground. He had the track.

Homer ran to where the dogs now milled in a body, barking and wagging their tails as they drank into their moist nostrils the exhilarating smell of lion feet. He crouched among the dogs like one of them. Homer strained forward eagerly with a tenseness that was more than professional enthusiasm. With gentle hands he pushed the dogs aside and crowded among them for a glimpse of the lion track. There it was, in a fragment of frozen and crusty snow. It was only half a track, the barest insignificant place where the lion's foot had spurned the edge of the snow patch in passing. But Homer's eye detected it at a glance, even though hound tracks were now superimposed on the lion print in a welter of muddy confusion.

"No, Buck, no! That track is going the wrong way. Here he goes, this way, boys, this way!" Homer was leading the dogs away in a new direction, down hill from the deer kill. If that hound pack had started on the wrong end of a lion track, they would have run it with as great skill and certainty, as much enthusiasm in the reverse direction. The end result, however, would be no lion and bitter disappointment.

Homer circled with his dogs as though he too were smelling the earth. I sensed the stimulation and the inner urge to hunt which was motivating both Homer and his canine friends. The day in those Mogollon Mountains was cold and raw. We were better back in our snug camp in the Gila River bottom sipping a comforting cup of coffee. What brought us on the arduous ride to this bleak mountain? What was it that drove us to this discomfort and violent physical effort? It was the urge to hunt which I had heard of before but never actually felt till now.

With little skill at finding tracks, especially after a herd of careless-footed hounds had passed over the ground, I found my-

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self milling among the trees with the best of them. A dog off to my left barked tentatively. Then another joined in, and another, and the barking swelled to a furious din. Those ten lion hounds made more noise when they found the lion track, than a whole kennel full of dogs at feeding time. Through the trees and scattered bushes on the slope I could see the upcurved tails of the enthusiastic dogs beating out the exhilarating rhythm of hounds with their noses on lion tracks. They had found the outgoing trail.

"Get the horses!" Homer yelled back over his shoulder and was off down the slope with his dogs, running wildly with his chaps flapping like bat wings at every stride.

I retrieved the horses and caught up to Homer and the hounds where they had met a momentary check in a thick growth of young pine trees. But in a moment one of the dogs caught the scent farther down the slope and we were off again, galloping wildly, with the dark branches of the winter trees whipping our faces as we rode. The horses galloped recklessly on the uncertain footing as though they too felt the excitement of the hunt. Homer's horse especially was an old hand at lion hunting. His forward-pricking ears were attuned to every bark of the hounds ahead. Homer had often claimed that he didn't even have to guide that horse on a hunt. The experienced animal simply followed the noise of the dogs and Homer spent his time fending off the branches and low-hanging boughs that threatened to unseat him at every clump of trees.

The cougar seemed to have avoided most of the patches of snow, and the spaces in between were beginning to thaw in the winter's sun. But the track was good. That big cat had lain just too long on his belly by the carcass of that magnificent buck deer. He had gorged his tawny sides until they were turgid with the raw, bloody venison. That cougar also had lingered precious minutes afterward to lick his paws and clean his muzzle and to straighten the pristine whiskers on either side of that same deadly mouth. A lion with his belly full of meat had swung down that slope. Perhaps that stinking flesh within him added to the odor of his going, for the dogs could run him at a high gallop except where the wily cat had stopped or turned a sharp corner.

Lion hounds, with cougar scent in their nostrils, can go faster

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than galloping horses. With the trees and brush and whipping limbs in our faces we were doing well to keep the hounds within hearing, let alone our sight. Our well-trained horses were sliding with bunched haunches over ledges and cut-banks where we wouldn't have walked them if we had stopped a moment to think about it. We rounded trees with deadly-looking snags protruding from them sufficient to gouge out an eye or tear off a piece of flesh if we had passed too close. We galloped at full speed between trees so narrowly growing that our knees barely scraped on either side. An inch either way and the rough bark and protruding knots would tear away the ligaments of a leg worse than a football injury.

But this was lion hunting. The cold wet air on that slope whistled through the horses' nostrils with a steely sound. Homer turned momentarily in the saddle to laugh back over his shoulder. He said something which was whipped away in the wind and the noise of the horses' hoofs.

The dogs were already in the bottom of the canyon below. The roar of their many voices came to us all together in an echo from the other side of the canyon. They had become killers. We too were killers, hunting another killer. It was the pitch of excitement reached in a fox chase with the thrill of a big game hunt thrown in. And through our civilized bodies ran the tingle of that old hunting instinct that had been our heritage for these many hundreds and thousands of years past. Our cave-dwelling ancestors had hunted to eat, and although we were not hunting to fill our bellies, the urge to hunt was in us none the less. The roar of the hounds brought it out as though the curtain of civilization had been dropped from before us.

Still galloping our panting horses we followed the course of the hounds by the sound, up the bottom of the canyon. We could not see a single dog amidst the tumbled tree tops and brushy clumps below us, but their barking rose and fell in crescendos. In the brief spaces of echoing silence in between, a single dog ahead on the track would voice the keynote of the musical theme; then the rest would take it up, repeating it and augmenting it.

We were dropping down over a stone ledge with our now-winded horses, when the lion broke cover. Apparently the big cat had been curled up digesting his meal beneath some thick

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tree in the canyon bottom. At first he must have been mildly interested in the distant barking dogs that invaded his wild domain. Then as they grew nearer, he realized that he was the object of this noise and confusion; that he, the killer cat, was in danger. With never a show of standing to fight the onrushing dogs, the lion broke cover and headed up the opposite slope of the canyon, running easily in long graceful jumps that spurned that steep slippery ground as though it were level.

"There he goes," yelled Homer, as he abandoned his slipping horse and started off down the slope. For a moment I thought of pulling out my rifle where it rode beneath my stirrup in its scabbard. But in the second the movement would take, the fleeing form of the lion would be gone. I might hit a dog and at that distance across the canyon, firing would be futile. My horse had just slipped on three legs down over the ledge and was standing precariously, unbalanced, on the slope below. I jumped off and followed into the bottom of the canyon and across. Horses are a liability in really thick country.

Panting and disheveled, with our knees covered with mud and granular snow, we struggled up the other side of the canyon slope. The roar of the barking dogs which had moved ahead so constantly, had now stopped on the ridge above us. The low-throated boom had taken on a yelping, insistent note that had not been there before. It was higher pitched and more deadly.

"Treed!" Homer gasped as we paused a moment against the bole of a steep-growing tree. "Come on!" With a reserve of energy which the gasping of our lungs belied, we struggled up the last of that slippery mountainside. Homer had been the main witness of a hundred lion hunts such as this one, but he seemed as excited as I and was yards ahead of me when we topped out in a low saddle on the ridge where the pine trees grew scattered and park-like. There were dogs all around us, some sitting, some leaping in the air, but all of them gazing upward with straining eyes and pointing noses—all sign posts to the goal of our strenuous effort.

There he was, a long-tailed, tawny, bewiskered lion. He perched on a limb which jutted from the ponderous bole of a pine tree not twenty feet above our heads. The cat balanced himself with downhanging tail like any alley pussy brought to

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bay in our front yard shade tree by a neighborhood dog. But this cat was a lion—a real American lion with all of the power and latent ferocity of his species.

He was a male with powerful shoulders and round paws as big as a man's outstretched hand. From where we stood directly beneath, we could see the tips of the curved claws as they slipped in and out of the furry sheaths on those innocent-looking toes. He still panted with heaving sides and we could tell by looking at him that his belly was yet full. He hadn't run far.

Homer now encouraged his dogs. These were the sights and sounds of which good lion dogs are made. Several young pups in the assemblage seemed undecided as to what to do next. One or two leaped frantically as though to sink their teeth into the dark furry end of the long tail that hung so tantalizingly above their heads. As each hound jumped with a furious yelp the lion scornfully curled the tip of his tail just out of reach, almost as though beckoning the hounds to further efforts.

But the lion was worried; he seemed to realize that this was his last tree. The snarls from his white lips were half-hearted and seemed to be drumming up courage for the snarler, rather than striking terror to the antagonist. It was clear even to me that he was going to his end on the limb of that pine tree without putting up a battle. The rippling muscles beneath his hide and the curved claws that slipped so tentatively in and out of their sheaths would be of value only if he knew how to use them. The dangerous canine teeth that protruded from beneath his soft muzzle and the strength in the mighty jaws that bunched on either side of his round cat head would not help him much now. He had been a flashing invincible foe to the shattered buck deer on the other side of the canyon, but he now seemed more a muscled faintheart confronted by his betters.

Homer raised the short rifle that he carried under his arm. The dog chorus grew still with the thrill of expectancy. The veterans looked up at the lion with the anticipation of foreknowledge. This was the end. I had the feeling that I was about to witness the action of a forest firing squad. There has been neither judge nor jury; military tribunal nor court martial. The evil in the killer was manifest from his very kind. He was a mountain lion, hunted by all men assisted by all good dogs. But was not

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this cougar a carnivore by nature? He had killed a lordly buck, yes. But was not this his way of life? Meat was his food; his cat stomach would take nothing less. Raw flesh was his sustenance and that flesh meant the death of some other creature. We humans should understand that; we have our slaughter houses.

My reflections were shattered by the crack of Homer's rifle. Homer never missed. In a situation like this even a near miss would have deadly results. A wounded lion on the ground meant dead or bitten dogs whose value was measured not only by their friendship, but equally in the dollars and cents of the time it had taken to train them. The bullet from that short rifle caught the cougar in the neck, its blunt lead snout shattering the vertebrae with the same splintering force which the lion had displayed when he crushed the neck of a deer victim. The lithe body and the long curling tail went limp on the instant of impact and he sagged backward from the limb without a sound.

As the inert body hit the ground with a thump, the hounds were upon it. This was their part of the show; this was what they had tracked so hard and so long to reach. Those same friendly dogs that had licked our hands and drooled for a morsel of food that morning were now baring their teeth with all the savageness of long-forgotten ancestors who lived in the wild. Dogs are carnivores too, and they rushed in a body to the fallen lion and seized whatever part of it their teeth could close upon. There was no barking now, only the growls and mouthed snarls that come from vicious animals when their teeth have sunk into flesh. Two of the dogs pulled on the tail that had aggravated them so long in the tree. One had a leg; another was pulling with all his strength at an ear, close to those now quiet jaws which were slowly reddening with a trickle of blood.

The onslaught of the dog pack jerked the heavy lion's body this way and that on the ground. Again and again they sank their teeth into the hide, to pull back with all of their strength, or to shake a leg or a limp lion paw back and forth as though they were killing a rat. These dogs were not eating, as many lion hounds will not touch cat flesh even when they are hungry. They were venting their spite on a fallen foe. This was the full measure of their satisfaction—to sink their teeth into the hated lion, their natural enemy. At the same time those dilated black dog nostrils

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could drink in the overwhelming cloud of lion odor that emanated from the body of the dead cougar. This was not the faint whiff of lingering scent in a lion track; this was the real thing—the source of the hated smell. This was the goal.

"Easy, boys," Homer was saying. "Don't tear the skin too badly." It was the finish not only of a lion and of a proud Mogollon deer, but also the end to as stirring a drama as any civilized person ever saw. Down beneath our powdered and rouged exteriors we too are quivering flesh. There are latent possibilities in both men and dogs that we seldom see on Forty-Second Street.

CHAPTER III

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CROOK was a specialist. It was not that he was an unimportant factor in the dog pack. Actually the rest of the lion dogs took him most seriously. But Crook regarded himself with a weight which went far beyond his canine character as adviser to the rest of the hounds.

Mountain lions can be caught only with dogs—good dogs. Even old Ben Lilly, so far as I know, never caught a big cat single-handed without the use of a dog pack. Many old hunters have never seen a lion in the wild, except in front of dogs. But it requires not only a canine with four feet and fur to do this business, but one with a nose as delicate as a French connoisseur and with a constitution like a Roman soldier. Crook was both of these and no one could deny that Crook was an expert. This dog with the droopy eyes and the gray muzzle came from a long line of experts. The dogs that belonged to Homer Pickens were the best in the business.

The science of scent has been woefully neglected in man. There has been considerable scientific discussion as to whether humans ever were able to smell as keenly as most of the animals. The fifth sense of man having relapsed into this woefully neglected state, we pass over most wilderness knowledge without ever knowing it is there. Outside of a particularly pungent whiff of Chanel No. 5, we can scarcely smell anything at all.

Crook lacked our finesse and he had other shortcomings in

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his character, but his black nose could wring from the surface of a rock every lingering trace of any unwary animal that had scraped its padded foot there. If that animal was a lion, those watery eyes of the old dog would light up with a fire that had been kindled by a hundred lion hunts, and the sound of his hoarse bark was a challenge which rang through the trees and over the mountain slopes like the call of a trumpet to battle.

There have been better lion hounds than Crook. I have seen big, red dogs with a long line of bloodhound showing in their long trailing ears and heavy bodies. The tenacity of a bloodhound on a human track is known to many a luckless convict in the canebrakes of the south. I have seen lion hounds with the swiftness of a fox hound whose blood ran in their veins. There are cat dogs that are faster than Crook. I have known others now long since gathered to their canine ancestors that could have bested Crook in any lion chase if the track was hot.

But for unwinding a difficult trail which no human eyes could see and few canine noses could smell, Crook was a paragon of perfection. Homer Pickens and I used to laugh at the old dog because he never took any one's word for a track. Crook had to poke that gray muzzle of his into every single impression that the lion had made. If the rest of the keen-nosed dogs barked ahead that the track was theirs and the chase was on, it made no difference to old Crook. He was not going to take any other dog's barking word for such an important fact.

The identification of each one of those prints, lingering with the faint odor of exhilarating lion smell, was a job which only Crook could do. As he poked his nose into each one of the tracks of the fleeing cougar, he voiced a hoarse bark and wagged the crooked tail that had given him his name. Years ago a female lion had bitten Crook's tail almost in two so that the shattered vertebrae now stuck out from his aging body with the contours of an old-fashioned poker. The bite on his tail had not only given this dog his name, but had also cemented his determination to hunt lions to his end with a tenacity and unity of purpose which is displayed by few dogs and certainly no humans.

Homer Pickens loved Crook. He had raised him and the two were much alike in many ways. Homer would take my word for something once in a while; Crook never would. It may be well

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to trust your fellow man, but the guiles of the world should make one wary. You can only be sure when you yourself have wrung from inhospitable surroundings the unvarnished facts. Old Crook with his gray muzzle and his drooping ears, frayed and split by the claws of a dozen lions, had learned to trust only his own nose, a nose that was second to none.

Too many times had Crook been fooled by some jug-headed pup dashing with ecstatic yelps off down the mountain following the reeking hoof-prints of a fleeing deer. Crook had heard even well-behaved dogs baying at treed porcupines because there was nothing else to bark at. Even some of the veterans of the lion pack would occasionally bark on a track even when there was no smell there, seemingly just to keep their hands in and feel that they too were a part of the trailing business. Crook had learned these things just as humans learn them—by the bitterness of experience and the disappointments of a fickle world.

Homer and I chuckled at the old dog when he came trailing in after a long lion chase. On a hot track the rest of the hound pack would run a lion trail at a high gallop, seldom putting their noses to the ground. As each one of the hounds up ahead excitedly yelped the direction, the whole pack was off, running together, their hound voices blending in a unison of echoing noise.

At the end of the chase, with the great, tawny lion lying panting on a tree limb or brought to bay on top of a boulder, the rest of the hounds were exceedingly pleased with themselves and vented their satisfaction by barking at the tops of their collective voices and leaping up into the face of the snarling, spitting cougar.

Perhaps hours later old Crook would arrive on the scene even after we had already killed the lion and skinned it. The old man would not take the word of any of those young and foolish pups, no matter how hot the track was. Old Crook believed nobody's nose but his own and he smelled every track in the long trail. We came to call Crook "Old Slow Sure."

"He's just like old man Estes," Homer used to say. "You can't tell the knot-headed old rascal anything, but when he tells you something you can depend on it."

It's the kind of personality you laugh at, but when there is something really difficult to accomplish, that is the kind of bull-headedness you need. Homer and I ran into just such a difficulty

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over in Alum Canyon in the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico. We had been having bilious weather that winter and equally bilious luck. The snows and sleets of that wet season swept down from the slopes of Granny Mountain with daily regularity. If we got a lion track on the snow it melted and was lost. If the cougar had tracked and prowled on dry ground, a frost or a sleet storm destroyed the scent. We had wet beds and cold food and no lion skins to hang up around camp. For one solid month of that winter we trailed and tracked at this miserable business without a single kill to our credit.

Homer said every night, as we made an uncomfortable camp on the cold and freezing snow, that we would have to depend on old Crook for this kind of trailing. Homer always curled the dog with the crooked tail up in a ball at night and placed him at the small of his back to keep him warm. Crook would neither unwind nor move until morning. The animal heat of his body was a pleasant source of warmth when the chill winds swept over that white landscape and filtered with icy fingers down through the trees.

I had to content myself with several less steadfast and more restless hounds to curl up in various strategic places around my bed to keep out the cold. Several contemptible pups that Homer was training insisted on getting on top of me to sleep which always produced nightmares of great grizzly bears with red, shining tongues and gleaming eyes, that tramped through the forest to step on my stomach.

The trouble in Alum Canyon on that wet winter was with two lions. The Mogollons are rough as a rule, but this particular corner of those picturesque mountains can only be described as precipitous. Great beetling cliffs of lava rock dropped off sheer to the green of the Gila River below. Ledges and pinnacles jutted in all directions to produce a terrain like a crumpled piece of paper that had been torn across again and again. Mountain slopes were too steep for our horses and in places too rough and insecure for even ourselves.

But across these trackless ways and rough ledges the lions roamed at will. Especially in the rough area of Seventy-Nine Canyon, these two green-eyed cats circled and climbed, ate and slept, but we could not catch them. Twice our whole hound pack

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picked up a trail which seemed sure of success. The hounds, both young and old, fairly roared along the track, but only for a short distance. The fickle thawing and freezing of the north and south slopes of these knife-edged ridges left even keen dog noses in baffled confusion. Occasionally by dismounting, Homer and I could circle ahead of the milling dogs to find the broad, round print of a lion paw in frozen mud or hardened slush.

Homer whistled to the dogs and pointed to the imprint. Any one of the hounds—Sue, Buck, Trailer or Bugger—would stick his flabby muzzle into the impression and make a noise like a vacuum cleaner with a burst bag. Then some faint trace of pungent lion smell that yet remained in the frozen track would titillate those sensitive olfactory nerves in that canine machine. Raising his head, the dog would bellow and thrash his tail with the excitement of wringing even a fragment of smell from a difficult situation. The rest of the dogs circling in the bushes would rush to the spot. We had gained a few yards.

But Slow Sure, with the crooked tail and dreamy eyes, would take nobody's word for it. He was hunting all of this time for every single print that the lion had made, every place that the beast had stepped on a log or crossed a rock. Occasionally Homer would go back a quarter of a mile or so to where old Crook was still working out a track and carry the dog bodily in his arms to where we knew the trail to be. Crook looked resentful, but resigned on these occasions, as though he were extremely disappointed in missing a few dozen lion tracks in the interval. Any one else who picked up Crook in this way was sure to be bitten with all the savageness of a wild animal. Old Slow Sure took his trailing seriously.

But on each of these heart-rending occasions the result was the same. The freezing mists of late afternoon would leave the lion track cold and impossible for even those keen-nosed hounds to follow. Our horses were exhausted from scrambling up the frozen slopes where the footing was always uncertain and dangerous. The hounds were discouraged and so were we. To make matters worse, two of our best dogs were caught in coyote traps set by a despicable trapper too close to the scene of our operations. We had seen some thousands of lion tracks during that weary month and had caught not a single cat. The two green-eyed cougars of

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Alum Canyon stalked the edges of the lava cliffs with impunity and looked down with questioning mien at the black ant forms of men and dogs that toiled on the icy slopes below in a dangerous and inexplicable manner.

But lion luck runs out and cat lives are numbered only nine. Old Slow Sure had counted off eight of these lives in the days before without our ever knowing that we were coming so close. On several previous occasions the venerable dog had crossed the rough brakes of Alum Canyon close to where the dark-shadowed gorge debouches into the trough of the Gila River itself. On these lichen-covered ledges Crook had tracked back and forth as he traced out the imprints of lion feet that had walked these same stony ways. But as each cold, raw day wore to a close with an early evening and no lion, it seemed that we never would straighten out a lion track in this cliff country sufficiently to catch the cat himself.

However, as we set out each morning from our camp in the bottom of the Gila Canyon, Old Crook would always start for this rough and broken country. In the Alum Canyon cliffs and ledges the dog with the broken tail would invariably find a lion track. As we could not take our horses among these inhospitable ledges we had to follow on foot which was arduous business. Tired and aching legs and an unsuccessful track are not conducive to high spirits and optimism, but Homer always said "Old Crook will iron 'em out; there are lions in these cliffs some place and we'll get them."

On a certain Monday morning, then, on cold and stiff saddle leather we set out to make a complete circle of this baffling Alum Canyon country. We were making this tremendous loop with more determination than high hopes. Perhaps if we could circle far enough up the straight-sided cut that they called Alum Canyon, we could cross our horses and skirt the cliffs on the far side where Crook had spent so much of his time. If we could get the whole dog pack into those tumbled rocks and overhangs, perhaps those cougars wouldn't be so lucky—just perhaps.

But as we swung our leg-weary horses along the many miles of this roundabout way, our doubts rose as before. There were the same icy winds; there was the same sickly winter sun that barely melted the skim of snow on the southern slopes to destroy any

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good track that we might find. There is good hunting weather when the gods of the chase smile on such as we, and there are evil-omen times when all nature balks and controverts us.

But we did find a deer trail that crossed Alum Canyon high up and we completed the circuit to come out with jaded horses, high on the cliffs above the mouth of Alum Canyon late on that memorable morning. Even as we stepped to the edge of the precipice and looked over, Old Crook sounded his first clarion bellow on a skirting ledge below.

The view was magnificent. If any lions had wanted a lookout place they could not have chosen a more admirable spot. The crooked green water of the Gila River wound from side to side of the red-rocked canyon in the deep below us. At our feet the lava pinnacles and points of Alum Canyon cut the side of the Gila gorge with misty shadows and blue overhangs of mysterious depths and distances. Up and down the main river we could see the dark openings of other canyons and other gorges also blue and misty and inviting exploration.

The lichen-covered lava rocks themselves were a welter of orange and green splotches, as though rock gnomes had splashed their paint brushes over the whole rugged scene. The bulk of the Mogollon Mountains themselves loomed behind these canyon wonders with many a snow-covered slope outlined with the perfect-pointed forms of firs and pines. Even on a biting winter morning, luckless in hunting as the case might be, such mountain fastnesses are wine to the soul.

Old Crook was trailing steadily now on the ledges below us. Our other dogs had gone to him and were joining in from time to time as they too found a short stretch of track with enough smell so that they could give tongue on it. We tied our horses and climbed down over the lip of the cliff to help the dogs. We could see the broken tail of our venerable old favorite moving below the edge of the rock like the feather on the head of an Indian brave out of sight below. We could tell by the movement of that broken member just what the dog was doing. First it wagged questionably as he stuck his muzzle in a likely looking spot and then thrashed furiously as his nostrils drank up the lion odor from the surface of the rock.

Whenever Crook barked, the rest of the dogs rushed to where

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he stood to find the scent. Sometimes they too barked, but half-heartedly and without conviction. It was a poor track. Even on this side of the Alum Canyon cliffs it looked as though the story was going to be the same.

We ate a frugal lunch, a candy bar and a soggy biscuit from that morning's breakfast, crumbled and flattened from the pocket of our chaps. Most of the dogs sat or lay around us with their long jowls dripping saliva in anticipation of some crumb which we might leave them. Old Tenacious was still barking on the cliffs below. The scenery was magnificent; the lion hunting was questionable.

Suddenly there was a roar of sound which echoed and reverberated from the straight walls of Alum Canyon gorge. The long-drawn note of Old Crook on the trail had suddenly become the furious barking of a lion-dog looking at a lion. Another dog joined in—it was one of the pups prowling also on the rocks below the cliff. Our other dogs that, seconds before, had been so dolefully hungry, had now disappeared over the edge of the rocks in a body, scrambling to be the first to get in the excitement.

We had scarcely reached the edge of the cliff when we saw the lion. Old Crook was in the face of the beast and both of them were on a narrow jutting ledge that reached out over the depths of the Gila Canyon with a sheer drop of a thousand feet below them. First one and then another of the other hounds reached the little rocky point where the cougar had come to bay. The pinnacles and rough-edged cliffs echoed a roar of sound which united in a crescendo of furious howls, barks and yelps that would have done credit to a volcanic eruption of major proportions.

I think Homer and I too were yelling as we scrambled down over the rocks and ledges with our chaps flying and loose rocks and fragments rolling from beneath our feet. But any sound of exhilaration which we might have made was completely lost in the roar of the dogs as they faced the snarling lion. Old Crook who had been the author of this splendid success, was pushed to the background and Bugger and Chito had protruded themselves in the very face of the cougar.

So furious was the onslaught of noise and confusion that the cat had backed to the narrow edge of the cliff so that his tail and hind quarters hung over the shadows of the empty gorge below.

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A wisp of blood-flecked foam dripped from those cat jaws and whipped away in the wind. The ears of the beast were laid back flat against his head, and the lips of his muzzle were curled up straight to reveal every white, gleaming fang down to its yellow base.

As the dogs crowded one another close, the lion unsheathed its claws and struck with a sidewise motion so quick that the movement was blurred to the human eye. Those raking, curved claws barely missed a dog with each strike, but still they crowded closer. The hounds behind pushed the ones in front into the very jaws of destruction. The long sweeping curve of those needle-sharp claws, or the bite of those white canines would find a mark in a matter of seconds. The dog or the lion or both could make a mis-step of only inches to plunge themselves into destruction on the rough lava rocks in the canyon below us.

I was struggling frantically to unlimber a movie camera which had been loaned to me by the naturalist, Arthur Pack, for just such an occasion. I devoured precious minutes in setting the lens and the focus to preserve one of the most striking and exciting scenes that any hunter had ever seen. With a large cinnamon red mountain lion with the face of the devil incarnate, fighting for his life against a backdrop of majestic canyons and distant cliffs, I could have conceived of no picture more striking if I had set the props in a studio.

But Homer Pickens behind me was fidgeting with a nervous gun. He held his rifle ready.

"The dogs—" The rest of what Homer said was drowned in another furious crescendo of barking. The rest of the dogs had pushed old Bugger almost between the front paws of the lion. The cougar struck again and again with lightning rapidity. I could see the fleck of red flesh that showed where Bugger's shoulder had been torn by a claw. The dog caught himself with difficulty under the impact and he hung for a brief second on the very edge of the cliff, scrambling for life. Those dogs were worth five hundred dollars apiece; they were our friends.

"I've got to shoot," Homer yelled behind me. The movie camera was clicking off steadily the drama on the little rocky pont a few feet ahead of us. I saw in the finder the paw of the

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lion find another mark. I moved closer to get a full-faced view of the lion over the very backs of the hounds when it happened.

The great cat with the purchase of his hind paws barely on the edge of the rock cliff, leaped clear over the dog pack crowded in front of him. With two tremendous bounds he cleared the edge of the cliff and was running along a ledge just below us. The cat-like certainty and precision of that fleeing beast were amazing. A miscalculation of inches in any one of his great bounds would have meant certain death. The lion was running along the face of the cliff as though he had suction cups on those big round paws.

Homer's rifle went off behind me with a concussion like a thunderclap, for the muzzle was right beside my ear. I could see the rock powder in a spurt of white dust over the lion's back. Again the rifle banged as I dropped the camera and jumped to one side to be out of the line of fire. The bullet ricocheted from the lava wall under the nose of the fleeing animal, and whined off into the depths of the canyon below. In another bound the big cat with the long trailing tail would be around a shoulder of the cliff and gone forever. The next shot would tell.

I glanced back for a single instant to see the glint of the light on the blue of the rifle barrel as Homer followed with his sights the great jumps of the lion along the face of the cliff. I saw the recoil and heard the deafening muzzle blast of the weapon. When I turned to look at the great cat, he was just leaving the edge of the cliff with a last forlorn grasp of his paws. With a movement as though he renounced all hope the cougar released his hold on the rough rock and slumped down and out into space, the life gone out of him. End over end the great body dropped with slow gyrations down into the shadows below. So far was it that we could not hear the plump of the cat's body as it shattered on the rough and inhospitable rocks of the bottom of the canyon.

It was midafternoon by the time we had toiled down those rocky slopes and ledges to retrieve the body of the Alum Canyon lion. We skinned the beast there where he had fallen, far below the beetling cliffs where he had come to bay. It was even later in the afternoon when we climbed back up to where we had tied our horses and began to gather our effects for a late return to camp. As we tied the lion's skin behind Homer's saddle, we

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heard old Crook trailing again on those same awesome ledges where the lion had stood.

"I believe that old fool is trailing that same lion track," Homer said with remarkable lack of confidence in an old friend. "Sure looks like it," I answered as I gathered up the reins, and then I saw over the curve of my saddle, the form of a lion—another lion bounding easily and gracefully along the edge of the cliff where we had just stood. It was not the limp and shapeless form of the lion skin with the dangling paws which we had just tied on Homer's saddle, but another cat even larger than the one we had just killed and certainly very much alive.

Even as I looked old Slow Sure broke into the furious barking that indicated that he too had seen the bounding, graceful form of that long-tailed thing. I cursed and struggled as my rifle stuck in the saddle boot on the off-side of my horse. The terrified animal wheeled and reared at the suddenness of my movement. Precious seconds fled by before I could wrench the weapon clear and turn again. Homer was staring at me as though I had been caught barking at porcupines myself. "Lion, lion!" I gasped, with that paucity of information which seems typical of such occasions.

The bounding beast had disappeared over the edge of the cliff when Homer and I ran up panting with our rifles in our hands to the spot where we had last seen him. There he was again, walking easily but swiftly, threading his way among boulders and rocks of a cliff edge below and in front of us.

I took a hasty sight at the slim body just as it rounded a big tumbled fragment of lava that had separated from the parent cliff. The bullet dug viciously into the rock, well above the lion, and the ricochet of the lead and the shower of rock fragments of the impact startled the beast again into full flight. Homer's gun went off beside me; I could not see where the bullet hit. I shot again and we both fired alternately every time we got a glimpse of that dark body in the ever-increasing distance of the rocks.

The day had held too much excitement for us to remember any of the precepts of a long hunting background—"take steady aim and fire when you are certain." We did anything but that. The little pile of empty brass cartridges that we had pumped out of our respective magazines was ample evidence that we were making a mess out of what had promised, for a few seconds, to be a

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perfect winter's day. With a last jaunty flip of that long dark tail the lion disappeared around the edge of a cliff. Our guns were empty and the barrels felt hot in our hands.

When Homer shoots, his dogs look for a lion to fall out of a tree. With the combined shooting of two frantic guns the hounds were beside themselves with excitement, but in the wrong direction. They were barking and yelping and bounding around our legs in an ecstatic chorus. With doglike fidelity they were looking with doleful eyes into the scattered juniper trees on the cliff's edge for a glimpse of the object of our chase. Not one of the other hounds had glimpsed the fleeing lion. Homer quickly ran to the ledge along which the cougar had passed. "Here, Buck, here Trailer, here Chief! Here he goes! This way!"

But there had been too much excitement and too much shooting to merely follow lion tracks. Every big hound with wildly waving tail was bounding ecstatically around us with his head in the air. Not a one would put his nose to the rock to follow those reeking, fresh lion prints made seconds before. "Where is that lion?" the dogs all seemed to say, and yelped and barked the louder.

"You dad-blamed, yellow-bellied sons of _____. " Homer dropped his rifle and seized two hounds by the collar to drag them bodily to the place where the cougar had passed. Then his eye lighted on old Crook. We had almost forgotten him in the excitement. Slow Sure was rubbing his nose on every spot on the rock that the fleeing feet of the lion had touched so lightly. Crook was trailing with disheartening slowness the track that the lion had made with such amazing speed.

While this drama was being enacted on the cliff edge, we had not noticed that the weather had taken a decided turn for the worse. The low gray clouds which had plagued us for so many days with their snow and sleet, now enveloped us all at once. The mountains in the distance with their forested slopes and white ridges faded from view and wisps and fragments of gray clouds crept along the cliff edges and filled in the depths of the canyons and clefts. A fine freezing mist began to fall. The horses, with their reins still trailing where we had dropped them in our haste, turned their butts into the subtle wind that crept up with cold steely fingers from the canyon cliffs.

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We redoubled our efforts to get the dogs on the track, but the excitement had been too much. Curse and stamp and shout as we would those veteran hounds simply would not take the scent. The urgency of the situation itself was our own undoing. Hound personalities simply did not react to urgency, especially when there had been plenty of shooting already. Even with old Crook barking out the trail, the other dogs would not go to him. One of the younger hounds jumped up and sniffed in a questioning manner at the lion's skin on Homer's saddle. Maybe that was the cat we had been shooting. "Where is that lion?" all the dogs seemed to say.

Homer was speechless with disappointment and dismay. He had used up every bitter invective in his usually mild-mannered vocabulary. These dogs were his friends. He had trained them all. He had slept with them. And now they bounced around us like a bunch of gaping canine morons while a lion escaped from under our very noses. Homer was as disappointed as though his favorite son had fainted on the recitation platform.

We sat on the edge of the rock and dangled our feet over into space. The river and the floor of the canyon far below us had long been obscured. The mists filled the depths like blue smoke and the chill in the wet air was becoming almost unbearable. The cold mist was beating into our faces with the insistence of larger and larger drops. Even at that we could hear old Crook barking on the ledge along the cliff as he followed the track.

"It won't be long now, poor old devil," Homer said between his teeth. "That track won't last fifteen minutes in this stinking weather."

Crook on the trail or not, second lion or none, we were confronted with the wet prospect of an awful night out on those cold wind-swept cliffs. Beneath the enveloping clouds almost straight below us was our cozy camp in the Gila bottom. Even our little tent and the Dutch oven full of cold biscuits seemed a vision of loveliness. We shivered involuntarily as we thought of the uncomfotting night ahead.

"Homer," I said between chattering teeth, "I think I saw a place about a half a mile downstream where we could get the horses off the edge of the cliff. The slope is steep, but we could lead them."

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"You're on," Homer replied with the first show of enthusiasm since the debacle of the dogs. "I looked at that place too. There are two or three game trails up and down the talus slope. It would take us all night to ride around the way we came, even if we could find the way."

That cold, biting rain and the stinging disappointment of losing the second lion had urged us into a folly which we should have good cause to regret before that wet night was done.

We climbed into our thoroughly wet saddles and whistled up the dogs. They followed us silently, with their tails tucked well between their legs. They seemed to feel that they had failed Homer Pickens although how miserably, even they did not suspect. As we left those memorable cliff tops we could hear through a lull in the wind, the long-drawn howl of old Crook on the trail. It seemed a shame to leave the old man in that mist and darkness, but he was a hunter; he would understand.

As we reached the edge of the steep descent which we hoped to make, it was totally dark. It was not the velvety blackness of a Mogollon night, when the stars wink out over Granny Mountain with the faint, soft light of friendly darkness. This was an enveloping blackness which concealed all shapes and dimmed all sounds. I could not even see the bulk of Homer's horse as I bumped into it in dismounting. The dogs were invisible, but constantly underfoot as we made our preparations for what promised to be a very hazardous trip downward.

It was the cactus that proved the first danger. As we stumbled down the steep slope, feeling before us, each step of the way, we could see neither trees nor rocks. We were in the very middle of a misty cloud and at night. There was no friendly reflection of the faintest sort from any of the mountain hazards around and before us. The first that we knew of one of the wicked-pronged buckhorn cacti was the stinging impact of a clump of wet needles in our face or arms.

If we held our hands in front of us, the cacti seemed to strike from the side. If we folded our arms across our faces in the attitude of a coward dodging a blow, the vengeful cacti prongs raked our elbows with stinging clumps of tiny points. That steep slope was studded with the awful spiny stuff.

But down we went, slipping and sliding. Twice my horse al-

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most rolled on top of me in the darkness, catching himself only with much plunging and snorting and the squeal of a luckless dog that had been stepped on in the melee. Homer and I kept together by talking constantly for we could see no outline or gain any suggestion of our positions except by sound. Picturesque oaths and quaint remarks when a particularly vicious clump of cactus caught us in the shin or arm served to keep our relative locations fairly accurate. We zigzagged down, down, down, into the mists of the canyon night.

It seemed that we had been going an interminable time. We must certainly be half way in that awesome descent. Homer had stopped just ahead of me. A hound whimpered and rubbed against my leg. I could smell the pungent odor which is peculiar to wet dogs. Homer's voice came out of the blackness, almost in my ear.

"It seems to be getting steeper. I think we'd better tie up the reins and let the horses go ahead. Horse eyes can see in this pea soup better than we can—we're apt to step over a cliff."

Jostling in the total darkness and feeling our way with each movement, we tied up the reins and pushed the horses ahead of us down the slope. As my animal passed by, I grasped his tail and followed, digging my boot heels into the ground to slow my descent. "Why didn't we think of this before." I said with mock gaiety, for the rain was beginning to run down the middle of my back in a cold and discomforting stream. Homer grunted in the darkness ahead.

We had gone perhaps fifty yards when the cold hand of disaster that had hovered over us all day, struck without sight or warning. Homer yelled out of the black murk. There was a flash, the first spot of light we had seen since that fateful night began. It was a single spark struck from the iron shoe of a horse as he scraped it frantically on the rock. There was the half neigh, half whine of a horse in agony—a sighing sound in the air like wind in a tunnel; then the crash of a heavy body hitting bushes and rocks far below in the darkness. Homer's horse had gone over a cliff. Homer. . . .

"Frank! For God's sake—" he said just below me. "The cliff—"

I pulled hard at the tail of my horse and the animal stopped with feet braced on that awful slope. I heard the snuffle of his

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nostrils as he smelled where Homer's horse had stepped off the cliff edge. My animal was following by scent; he couldn't see any better than I. In those two seconds, with the crash of Homer's horse far below still coming to us out of the rainy darkness, the tail of my mount was suddenly jerked from between my outstretched hands. Lured off by some doom demon, my horse had stepped from the edge of the cliff like a suicide, as indeed it seemed.

For an awful instant, I tottered on the brink, clawing wildly in the darkness for something to support me where I found nothing but intangible mists and phantom shadows. My feet slipped in the wet mud and I fell to the side, clutching with biting fingernails at a thick root which protruded from the soggy ground. The awfulness and depths of the drop over which we hung were multiplied a thousand times by the darkness and cold.

The root to which I clung turned out to be Homer's leg. He also was clawing the ground, with his finger ends crooked into the wet mud for support. I turned to hear the noise of my own horse as he fell, end over end onto those awful rocks that must lie below. There was a shower of sparks where his iron shoes rasped the rock as he turned; then silence.

We had seen a hundred cliffs of this sort on the canyon sides of this terrible country. We must have zigzagged far to one side. Who could keep direction in that wet blackness? And now our horses that had served us so well, lay battered and bleeding carcasses on some jagged canyon rocks. And what of our saddles and our rifles in their scabbards, and the valuable camera which I had borrowed?

If we were ill with disappointment and the cold wet before, we were downright sick now. We were clinging precariously on the very edge of a cliff of unknown height and unseeable extent. We worked our way cautiously in the mud up the slope for a short distance and then along to the side to try to skirt the sheer drop which had been the death of our horses. We worked our way in one direction, keeping contact by sight and touch. The energy of our exertions and the perspiring fear that the next step might send us, too, hurtling over the muddy brim of some beetling cliff,

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seemed to keep us warm with an unnatural and uncomforting heat.

For some two hours, we inched ourselves along in this way to find some sliding route by which we might descend and keep our bones whole, if not our skins. Each time as we lowered ourselves cautiously down the slope, our extended feet tentatively probed the darkness below us for a secure foothold. Each time there was that awful moment when there was only space below us—fearful, blood-chilling space. That cliff edge seemed endless in extent.

There was nothing to do but retrace our steps in the other direction to see if we could find the opposite end of that unseeable cliff. Somewhere it must fade into minor ledges and slopes where we could slide down. On one side or the other must be the relatively friendly incline which had looked so passable in the light of day. We could not lie there in the wet darkness in that steep mud, so we kept moving. It was not until almost daylight that we found a way down. It was only then by taking hairbreadth chances which we took because we were too tired to do otherwise. We hung by bushes down over the edges of rocks not knowing whether the drop was six or sixty feet. Total blackness and dizzy heights are a fear-inspiring combination.

The cold, sickly light of a wet winter dawn glinted over the canyon rims as we reached the bottom. We were smeared with mud which in many places was mixed with the blood and scratches of the many wounds which had gone all unheeded the latter part of the night. There was not a smile left in us.

As the light grew stronger, hungry and dead weary as we were, our first duty was to our animals. Perhaps one of the gallant beasts yet lay shattered but alive on the rocks and must be dispatched with a merciful bullet through the head. Perhaps by some good chance in an entire night of misfortune, some of our equipment remained to be salvaged.

As the cheerless light filtered down into the canyon shadows, we looked back up through the mists at the awesome heights we had descended through that memorable darkness. What hare-brained fortune had ever set us at such an impossible scheme? We, as well as our horses, could have been killed a hundred times on those many drops and treacherous ledges.

"Look!" said Homer, with his muddy hands outstretched in a

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gesture of amazement and incredulity. There was a horse—my horse, grazing peacefully at the river's edge. But wait—he was disemboweled. That awful black thing on his belly could only mean that the entrails and viscera of the poor animal were herniated and torn beyond recovery. As we ran toward him he raised his head with an alertness which was not that of a wounded animal.

"Why, it's the saddle!" I shouted, as though that beaten and torn piece of equipment were not beyond repair. It was indeed my saddle. The cantle was hanging as limp as the ear of one of our faithful hounds. The horn was broken, one stirrup was gone. The saddle was a mess as it hung by frayed cinches beneath the horse's belly. But the horse was all right. What did we care for a hundred dollar saddle? The poor animal seemed actually glad to see us as we looked over his hurts. His nose and face were skinned completely from the tip of his muzzle to between his ears. Both foreleg knees were also bare of any skin whatsoever and he held one hind leg up in a tentative manner when he shifted his weight. But there was not a bone broken, not a single really serious bruise. I cut off the damaged saddle and laid it on a rock by the river.

Homer had been looking around for his horse, Skip. "Look," he yelled like an excited boy. There was Homer's horse too, without any vestige of a saddle, but with one bridle rein still trailing in the wet grass. The animal walked on three legs, but walked nonetheless and whinnied to boot. Homer's horse too was peeled from nose to tail. From a short distance away in the light of dawn, his sorrel color seemed splotched and patched with areas of mange which turned out to be bruises and skinned places on the poor beast's hide. But he was alive and apparently well. The animals must have fallen over the cliff and struck at the bottom on another slanted, muddy slope such as the one where we had clung. The oblique impact and the wet ground had lessened the fall, for here they were, cropping the wet grass of the canyon floor. At least we had not lost a life in that awful night.

But what of the camera, the guns, the chaps and Homer's saddle? What of the lion skin? My heart sank as I pictured the movie camera a scattered wreckage of cogs and broken lenses on some sharp lava rock. But as the sun rose to bite with its sickly

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pallor through those evil mists, our star of fortune seemed to smile again.

We found the camera, still in its leather case, reposing peacefully in a pool of water. It was uninjured. We collected our rifles, one with a splintered stock. We found Homer's saddle where his horse had landed on his back and the saddle had apparently broken his fall. The cinches and girths had burst from the impact like a baked potato. We surveyed the damage of our little pile of broken and scratched possessions at the foot of the cliff. Homer's chaps were gone. We could not find his spurs. My rifle was a wreck.

Both our saddles looked as though they had been pounded on an anvil, but here we were with no contusion that wouldn't heal up in a week or so. And there were our horses, skinned and bruised, but now grazing peacefully. We started back through the tall, wet grass to camp. Wouldn't a cup of steaming hot coffee taste wonderful! We even talked a little of getting that other lion on the cliffs above us.

Our little tent looked so snug and dry on that wet morning. As we walked closer there was a sudden movement and stir within the V-shaped opening of the shelter. A long gray muzzle and a pair of watery eyes looked out, and the canvas pulsated to the beat of a bent tail.

It was old Crook. He was yawning and stretching as he uncoiled himself from his position on Homer's comfortable pillow. The old dog was dry, warm and had obviously helped himself copiously from our camp provisions. His face had a dolefully happy expression and he seemed to say "I caught the other lion up there; where were you fellows all night?"

CHAPTER IV

THE CATALINA HELLCAT

THE Bellote Ranch lies in a saddle between the rugged desert ranges known as the Catalina and the Rincon mountains in southern Arizona. They were having trouble on the Bellote—lion trouble, as so many ranchers were. Swede Parker, the owner of the Bellote outfit, had found a dead cow in the live oak thickets behind the ranch house. The belly of the beast was torn away and there were tooth marks on the back and neck. Lion kill was written all over the bloody business.

Cougars are poison to the rancher. He fears for his calves and his horse colts. Actually, if we tabulated all of the domestic animals that were unequivocally lion kills, their number would be surprisingly few. But the fact that the cougar can and does sample domestic stock has made him the sworn enemy of the stock grower. Then, too, I have never seen a rancher or a cowhand who did not enjoy a lion chase. Usually a single set of lion tracks is enough to send them howling for a professional lion hunter with the excited pronouncement "that the lions are simply eating me up."

But on the Bellote it was different. It was true that they had found only one cow and that had been covered with leaves and sticks as every legitimate lion kill invariably is. But there were lion tracks all around the place. There were the fresh round imprints of a full-grown lion in the dust of the road not a hundred yards from the house. There was a set of undeniable cougar tracks

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down the sandy wash that ran past the corral. Mrs. Parker had even seen a lion track on the edge of the patio beneath her very window. (It might possibly have been the somewhat blurred outline of a cowboy's bootheel as he stood there with a guitar, but the knowledge that you have lions in your yard is enough to make anyone a little edgy.)

Although the Catalina Mountains are a famous lion hangout, the Bellote Ranch had a problem only with a single beast. At least, it seemed to be only one lion, as its habits were so peculiar. Twice the cowboys had actually seen a cougar, both times, they were certain, the same individual. This cougar was a pale buff color, lighter and more washed out than most. But it was the outlines of the cat that made them so sure. "She was long and skinny, like a dragged-out house cat," one of these men told me. "Her neck was as thin as my arm and even her tail looked scrawny."

The authenticity of the cowboys' account was established with me when they said that the beast made a noise at them like a bird before it slunk away in the shadows behind their camp. I have found that few persons know that the typical call of the mountain lion is a note which indeed sounds like a bird.

If the cowboys had told me that the cougar screamed at them out of the night with a chilling sound like the death throes of a throttled woman, I would have discredited their story entirely. But the eye-witness account of a slim and hungry lion so close to the ranch house was disturbing indeed. Such lions, when they grow old and mangy are the ones that turn into man-killers. These are the cats, when their faculties are reduced by age and their teeth worn off from the long years of carnivore use—these are the killers that turn to any meat they can find. Humans are the stupidest animals and the easiest to kill when they venture into the wilds. It was not a good situation when a hungry lion prowled around humans' houses. There were children on the Bellote too.

Frank Colcord, the professional hunter of southern Arizona, was summoned in haste. I arrived from New Mexico the same day at the Bellote and we set up a base camp at the ranch to hunt this Catalina cat. We followed in the next two months in that rugged terrain, some dozens of lion tracks—of cougars, large and

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small, both male and female. It seemed at times as though we needed a spiritualist as well as a pack of well-trained hounds to catch that tantalizing lion. We never caught her, but we did find out her story.

Most of the people at the ranch accompanied us on these hunts. If there was any possible excuse to get away from branding the cattle or the ranch chores around the corral, they would find it. Most often as we started out, we would have a party of four or five, all well-mounted.

Frank Colcord himself was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a cowboy background. He hunted lions for a living, but in reality did it because he wanted to. He had a good ranch up in the Tonto Rim country, but seldom went to it. The lure of the chase had long ago made him a devotee of the lion trail. It was meat and drink to him, just as it had been to old Ben Lilly before. Frank's hunting knowledge and his pack of capable dogs made an awesome combination. The Catalina cat or any other lion in the Bellote country would have to be wary indeed to escape.

The cowhands were convinced that the elusive lion of the Bellote was a female and they quickly dubbed her the "Catalina Hellcat" because, as one of them told me, "she's as hard to pin down as a woman and she's hell on the nerves."

The first day out from the ranch we got a track and a good one. The dogs gave tongue before we had ridden a mile from the ranch house on the Catalina side. The ground here was peculiar and different. It was made up of granitic sand, disintegrated in geological ages past from the granite cliffs and pinnacles that towered above us on the Catalina escarpment. Through this white granite sand, gullies and ridges descended to meet in broad washes which ran water only during the infrequent rains. Along these sandy washes the live oaks grew in clusters and groves which had given the Bellote Ranch its name.

This terrain was peculiar. We found that this rough granite stuff either made an excitingly good lion track or none at all. Apparently the cats, as they padded through these washes and over these granite ridges, rubbed off an extraordinary amount of the material from the pads of their feet. This made smell and the dogs could follow it at a dead run. Galloping with shouts and riding as though we were in a cowboy rodeo ourselves, we

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twisted and turned among the low-hanging live oak trees. We galloped across the broad washes, only swerving here and there to avoid a clump of cactus which also cursed this country with its presence.

We caught our first lion before noon of the first day. The panting cat was treed on the broad sweeping limb of an oak just above our heads, as we sat on our horses. We looked up against the brilliant light of the sky at the cougar, apparently a full-grown male. He seemed in the prime of life. His coat was glossy with good feeding and the longer fur on his tail and belly was soft and even.

"That ain't him," pronounced one of the cowboys, and turned away toward the ranch house. We had caught a full-grown lion and the Bellote people weren't satisfied. They wanted only a certain one.

In the next three weeks we caught two more lions, all on the Catalina edge of the ranch. After each of these exciting chases, with much galloping and shouting and the barking of dogs, the pronouncement was the same. One of the men of the Bellote would shake his head in a determined manner: "Nope, that ain't the one," and turn away. Did we have to catch every lion in southern Arizona to bag one particular scrawny specimen that these husky men were afraid of?

The same day that we caught our second lion, one of the women at a cow camp at the other end of the ranch, saw the Catalina Hellcat, as they all called it, slinking in the bushes near her. It was the same slim, long-necked cougar that the others had described and it emitted the same bird-like call as it wound out of sight among the trees. The poor woman, the wife of one of the cowboys, was so terrified that she pulled down a whole line of washing which she had been hanging out, and dirtied the lot on the ground.

This was the third time that this thin and rangy beast had appeared. It is so seldom that a lion is seen in broad daylight when not pursued by dogs, that each event provoked more than a little comment. The Catalina Hellcat became a topic for between-drinks conversation at the bars in Tucson. All agreed as they nodded over their glasses, that the hungry-looking beast was hanging around the ranch awaiting an opportunity to kill and eat

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some defenseless child or maul a lone woman. These ranchers concluded also that Frank Colcord and I would have to stop sitting around the ranch talking to the beautiful Mrs. Parker and do something. Frank and I, at this point, had been riding an average of ten hours a day.

People were now beginning to see glimpses of the Hellcat at other ranches round about. Every furtive night shadow or the call of the poor-will in the distance became a green-eyed slinking cougar ready to pounce and kill. Frank and I were riding in all directions following each one of these reports. Usually some hysterical woman had caught a glimpse of a house cat or a coyote which the evening shadows had magnified into a lion's shape. We were disappointed to learn that even veteran ranchers didn't know what a lion track looked like. In following these false clues, we dissipated our time and the gasoline in our pick-up truck. The Hellcat of the Catalinas seemed always to be behind us, no matter what direction we turned.

Then one morning we found the track. We had scarcely started from the house when we crossed it. The round imprints of the big cat had skirted the barns and corrals and circled not far from the house itself. We could see where the beast had turned and looked at our own lighted window the night before. The tracks made almost a complete circle of the Bellote grounds, then started off west into the granitic ridges and many washes of the Catalina Mountains. It must be the Catalina Cat this time. No other lion would dare to approach the smells and sights of man's activities so closely. Usually lions stay widely clear of man and his habitations. This was the long-necked cougar that had been the terror of the Bellote country. It was a good track.

Even the dogs seemed to realize that this was not an ordinary situation. They had to catch this lion. None of the usual excuses of trailing mishaps would be accepted. The Catalina Hellcat must be brought to bay.

Swede Parker and the cowboys with us too seemed more grim than was their usual wont. The jocular, hilarious whooping spirit of a lion hunt seemed absent. This was deadly business with a deadly end in view.

The dogs ran well, with Old Judge in the lead. Judge was to Frank Colcord what Crook had been to Homer Pickens. Blue,

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another one of Frank's dogs, led the chorus of the hounds with a deep, booming note that he had inherited from his bloodhound ancestors. Across the broad washes and around the granite cliffs we continued ever westward into the heart of the Catalina Mountains. Mile after mile we trotted our horses or guided them among the now-thickening vegetation among the rocks. Still the dogs led on, ever ahead of us, straight away from the Bellote Ranch. The lion tracks were leading us back into those rough mountain fastnesses which might be the sanctuary for almost anything. Apparently this famous beast came only occasionally and from a distance to circle the Bellote ranch house and frighten with its presence the good people there.

The morning wore on and the day became hotter. At noon we ate a meagre lunch from our chaps' pockets as we rode along. By midafternoon the two cowboys with us turned back. They had to bring in some cattle that evening, and our chase promised to be a long one. They waved Frank, Mr. and Mrs. Parker and me a goodbye as they walked their horses down a brushy gully and out of sight. Far up the ridge we could hear the booming call of old Blue as he took the track ahead of the rest of the dogs. The hunt was still on.

As the evening shadows lengthened, we climbed up and up, zigzagging back and forth from ridge to mountain side. Below and above us, awe-inspiring granite pinnacles reared out of the trees and brush on the slopes as though they grew there also. Higher and higher into the mountains we went, struggling to keep our jaded horses within hearing of the dog pack ahead. The hounds ran steadily, but the tracks of the Catalina Hellcat appeared before them one after another in an endless succession. It was almost dark.

We found a little water for ourselves and our horses beneath a little rocky cliff at the side of a wash. We brushed the green scum and algae which covered it to the side and drank greedily. It was water which we never would have touched under other circumstances, but a lion hunt is a peculiar leavener of finicky appetites and civilization's prejudices.

When the sun goes down over these desert mountains, the night winds begin to reach through the trees with cold, penetrating fingers that stab through even a heavy jacket. The warmth

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of the horse below the saddle feels welcome, whereas only a few hours before there had been perspiration and burning heat.

The moon would not rise till early morning on that cold night and there seemed little chance that we would overtake the Catalina cat before the last glow faded from the sky. We were faced with a supperless, cold camp somewhere on that mountainside. It was already almost too dark to dodge the swinging limbs and the occasional clumps of cacti through which we rode.

We caught up to the dogs on a high ridge where they were milling about in a desultory manner trying to find where the track turned. Frank Colcord went among them, whistling and speaking to them softly to get them to leave the track. We must miss none of them in the darkness as one dog going on by himself would only spoil our chances of catching the Hellcat the next day.

We led our weary horses off the ridge down into a little gully out of the wind. Here the poor beasts stood with drooping heads and quivering muscles—those same mighty muscles that had thrust our combined weights up the steepness of those hills and ridges. We prepared to spend what was going to be a very uncomfortable night. This is known among lion hunters as “laying it out.” It will, as Homer Pickens once told me, “make you old quick,” but at least one has plenty of time to think under these circumstances.

Preparing to lay it out, then, we built a fire in the little clump of juniper trees in the hollow and started to build a windbreak on one side to keep out some of the cold penetration of that persistent night draft that swirled down so quietly, but so uncomfortably, into our little hollow. Frank Colcord and I had “laid it out” before. We had found that if we consumed a large portion of the night building a windbreak and preparing bough beds, the rest of the night didn’t seem so long. Also the violent activity of cutting poles and stripping limbs, not only dissipated the saddle stiffness of the day’s hunt, but kept one warm from exertion. While the lowlands were warm, up in this mountain altitude it usually dropped below freezing at night, as this was very early spring.

If one gets any sleep at all under these trying circumstances, it is by diligent use of the materials at hand. The lion hounds themselves are the hot-water bottles of the hunt. These dogs, exhausted after a long day’s trailing, curl up on the leaves around

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the fire and will not move unless disturbed. Then too, the hunter has his own saddle blanket and saddle as well as a pair of chaps. On a bed of feathered evergreen boughs, the saddle may be arranged as both a pillow and wind-break. The saddle may be placed around the middle to guard strategic portions of the anatomy from the creeping cold. Two or three hounds arranged around one's person will create a very satisfactory delusion of warmth at least in those particular places. It is comforting to remember that hound fleas prefer to stay on hounds, even with a delicious human in close proximity.

With muscles tensed as we tried to knot ourselves into a round ball like our lion dogs, we fitfully slept out the long night hours. The stars looked like a million steely points in the heavens and they too seemed to add to the cold with their pale light. By the time the moon rose on that particular night, we were all sitting up around the fire, having abandoned our uncomfortable beds and the sleeping hounds. We divided what little food we had left in our pockets, which amounted to two candy bars, a very very frugal breakfast indeed. We saved one candy bar for what the coming day might bring. It was a life saver.

We decided to leave our tired horses, as the poor beasts were so leg weary that we could not possibly have whipped and spurred them up another one of those awful slopes. We cached our saddles in a tree to keep them away from gnawing rodents, and prepared to continue the hunt on foot. We wakened up our sleeping dogs who uncoiled themselves with many yawns and the stretching and flexing of their cramped muscles. In spite of the fact that these faithful hounds had had nothing to eat, they seemed more refreshed than ourselves. We petted them and encouraged them until they bounced around us, wagging their tails with a semblance of their usual joy and enthusiasm.

Swede Parker turned back toward the ranch from which he had been too long absent. Frank Colcord, Mrs. Parker and I turned toward the loom of the mountain slope rising above us. Tired and gaunt as we were, we would try again to see if the Catalina Hellcat could escape us another day.

There was not a vestige of the light of dawn in the sky as we started up the slope. We could see far out in the desert plain at the foot of the mountains, the winking of a tiny light. Some

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rancher was getting up to milk the cows, even this early. Or perhaps it was the headlight of an automobile. And yet in that cold moonlight around us loomed the shapes of virgin forest trees that had never known an axe, and the rocks and ledges that rose among them were only the domain of wild beasts. Civilization's hand rested very lightly on this part of the western wilderness.

At first our tired muscles almost refused to work. The gnawing of empty stomachs have a sense of weakness which seemed to numb the whole body. We had been too long accustomed to the regular three meals a day which our civilization feeds us with debilitating regularity. However, by the time we had topped out on the ridge, even the persistent night wind did not seem quite so cold in our exertion. Frank whistled encouragingly to his dogs.

"Find the track, Judge,—find it boy! Come on, Blue! Come on, Bulger! Let's go!" There was the sniffing of hound noses in the dark, then the thrashing of tails. That remote and lonely mountain slope which had been so deathly quiet all the long night, resounded to the long-drawn bark of a hound close by. Even at that we shivered involuntarily, as though for a second it had sounded like a wolf cry. But we were the hunters, and somewhere far above us in those rocks, the ears of a certain cougar might tingle to the bellow of that dog. We were off again.

It was almost enjoyable as the light began to grow over the peaks and the red rim of the sun appeared behind the blue and layered mountain ranges to the east. The warmth felt welcome after the chill of the night and in our exertions we forgot how hungry we were. The lion track was still a good one and we discussed the probability that we would have caught the cougar if we had gone on just a little farther the previous night.

But the grateful glow of the rising sun, as it colored the tops of the trees and rocks around us, changed to the discomforting heat of midmorning. Still we climbed, using our rifle stocks as staffs to aid us on the rough slope. Still the lion track and the dogs upon it unwound before us, slanting up and ever up into the higher peaks of the Catalina Mountains.

We crossed high granitic ridges where we had to use both hands and feet to make the ascent, and hand the rifles up to one another. We wound down through the canyons, so heavily overgrown with oak brush that we were lost in a maze of tearing limbs and snags

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through which we could scarcely force our way. At other times we passed through long parklike stretches of yellow pine, growing as though they had been planted in some feudal estate, to leave open vistas and broad winding avenues among them. There were thick groves of close-lying evergreens on the northern slopes, so interwoven that the sun scarcely reached the forest floor. This Catalina cat could claim all of this as her domain, and apparently she was roaming all of it in her efforts to escape us.

Noon, with the sun directly above us to the south, passed by with no pause for lunch. There was nothing to eat. Some of the dogs were lagging now in the heat of the day. And on the white rocks their feet left bloody prints, where the pads on their toes had been worn raw. By the middle of the afternoon three of the younger dogs had quite the track entirely, and were following behind us with drooping tails. Ours were drooping too, but we kept doggedly on. Mrs. Parker's endurance was amazing. Most outdoor men would have given up as a bad job long before now. But Frank Colcord was a lion hunter; he never gave up. Mrs. Parker seemed to have the endurance of two ordinary persons, and I of course, was lured on by the excitement of catching the Catalina Hellcat. It was like trying to bolster up a bad investment. We had put this much time and fatigue after that elusive lion; we could just as well put a little bit more.

But as we forced our resisting muscles to climb ever higher on those precipitous slopes, the lion had been there before us, ever keeping her distance. The track seemed to grow no better, nor any colder. Occasionally as we pushed ourselves up the steep inclines, we could see the big round track of the lion among the prints of the dogs. Those lion paws had traveled as easily over this rough ground as though it had all been level. On and on the lion went as though searching for something she never caught up with.

From the nature of these tracks, we had long ago concluded that we were following a female lion, as we had found no "scrapes" and we were certain too that this lion was the terrifying beast that had showed itself around the Bellote Ranch. This was the dangerous cat which we must catch. Just a little farther around the next cliff, perhaps! Through that next grove of trees

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and the dogs would come upon the cougar asleep! Then we would make the kill and turn back to food and rest.

It was late afternoon of the second day of this gruelling hunt. We were going more slowly now. The dogs ahead of us lagged and were perceptibly tired. We were dragging ourselves along by the sheer determination to see it through. We were gaunt and drawn and there was no joking or unnecessary talk among us. I almost hoped that something would happen to end this interminable hunt. If we could only catch that Hellcat, it would be more of a relief than a victory. Then we could lie down under one of those comfortable-looking trees and sleep for weeks.

The inevitable coolness of the night wind was already beginning to breathe its discomforting cold from the depths of the canyon below us. The twilight shadow was deepening the purples and blues of the darkening plain to the east.

The dog pack, those who were still on the trail, were barking sporadically on a low rounded ridge that swept up toward the Catalina peaks that still towered above us. Suddenly there was a break in their weak barks, like a pause before a mighty storm. Then it broke. First one hound and then another broke out into furious barking, with a high-pitched quality that means that they have scented a kill. Those same fatigued dogs that a moment ago had been dragging along with no hope, were now rounding over the crest of the ridge at a dead run and in full cry.

The booming noise of the hounds ahead quickened our steps as a stimulant. We dropped off our fatigue like a cloak of darkness. There were reserves of energy which our tired bodies had kept well concealed. We almost sprinted as we tried to keep up with the dogs. We even had a moment between gasping breaths to speculate as to what the Hellcat would look like as she sat in a tree. This was the end of the hunt.

As we pulled ourselves to the top of the little ridge, the dogs were already following its crest upward toward the high peaks. We could see them in the twilight darkness, two or three hundred yards above and running strongly, barking at every step. We paused a moment on the crest of the ridge to get our bearings.

“Look,” Frank Colcord said with an agonized cry, “Look! It’s another lion track.” Where he pointed up the ridge we could see four or five piles of dirt and leaves in a row, one behind the

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other, as though some ghost had dug a line of postholes on this lonely ridge and piled the dirt neatly to the side. "Good Lord!" Frank groaned as he knelt by one of these piles. "It's a male lion and they're following him the wrong way. It's the end."

A male lion, and a big one, had come stalking down the ridge courting the Hellcat which we had followed so long. As this proud cougar had descended to a meeting with the female, he had made scrapes in the dirt and leaves as part of his courting antics. On each of these piles of dirt which he had scraped up with his paws, he had deposited some of his urine as a scent station. Let other lions beware if they should read this calling card. This was his domain and this was the lioness he had chosen for his mate.

But this lion's braggadocio resulted in a disaster to us. On the very verge of success and after we had come so far, we were undone. The scent which he had so carefully left on his scrapes was still drifting away on the evening wind to lure the noses of our unfortunate dogs in the wrong direction. This male courtier, upon whose track our hunt had been wrecked, had turned off down the ridge, walking side by side with the female Hellcat which we had come to catch. Undoubtedly the two walked off with many protestations of affection and uttering the same bird-like calls that had struck terror to the Bellote Ranch.

This lioness that had searched so long, had found another lion—a mate—which undoubtedly explained her restlessness and her long trips through the mountain canyons. Lions under the stimulus of the mating impulse will travel whole mountain ranges with nervous restlessness. Undoubtedly at that very instant the two were walking along amorously in the shadows of the canyon, wondering what the strange noises of men and dogs on the ridge above might mean. So far as I am aware, those two lions have not yet learned how lethal a pack of barking dogs can be.

As our dogs disappeared in a burst of enthusiasm up the ridge, our last hope vanished. No miracle could save the hunt now. We were finished. Weariness, which had been creeping over our bodies like a sickness, now seized us all at once and we dropped literally in our tracks.

Only Frank Colcord, with a show of energy which was truly astounding, started up the ridge to retrieve the dogs. Even on the fresh back track of the lion, he caught them within a mile. It

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was a commentary on the fatigue of the hounds as well. If the dogs had been at all fresh, no human being on foot could have possibly overtaken them. It was almost completely dark when Frank returned with the sulking, silent forms of the hounds behind him. The hunt was finished. It was done as far as the lion was concerned, but not as far as misfortune and mishance.

So tired were we that we simply dropped down over the side of the ridge out of the wind and made camp. It was too dark and we were too tired to search for water, although we had had nothing to drink since noon. We prepared to "lay it out," not only drawn from hunger, but gaunt from thirst as well. We carefully divided the precious candy bar into three equal portions to the last crumb, and gulped these tidbits down our dry throats.

Even this little seemed to assure our misused bodies that life could endure somehow. We dragged up a large pine log, redolent with pitch and rosin which might burn for a long time. We set this ablaze and in the cheering warmth of the flame we dropped down on the pine needles and were soon asleep among the weary dogs.

Even the creeping cold of the night winds did not awaken us. It was heat that did, the intense heat of a fire larger than the pine log beside which we lay.

Mrs. Parker awakened first when the wind fanned the flames and sparks down over her. She sat up with a start to find an entire pine tree a blazing torch above us. She quickly awakened Frank and me and we gazed with reddened eyes at the awful spectacle around us. That insidious wind had whipped the blaze of our campfire log into the low branches of an adjacent pine tree. Apparently the dry needles had kindled like kerosene and the blaze had swept up the branches and trunk of the pine in a roaring pillar of fire. This tree had alighted two others and when we woke, our little camp on the slope was almost surrounded by roaring columns of flame that wavered and billowed as the wind swept over the ridge behind us.

Frank Colcord quickly organized us to fight the fire. Fortunately the trees were very scattered here and with luck we might confine the conflagration to the small area around our camp. He set us to scraping away the pine needles down wind, where flaming sticks and bunches of blazing debris were falling from

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the burning trees. With green branches torn from neighboring trees, we beat out the sparks and small fires as fast as they appeared. All the time that same wind fanned the hot breath of the fire down upon us.

Still we kept our protesting bodies at this awful work. We beat and stamped with the frenzy of panic. This was not foolish pride such as that which had held us to the completion of the lion hunt; this was fear that drove us to fight the fire which might, with a change of wind, spread over the whole mountainside.

Toward morning one of the blazing trees—a partially dead one—fell with a crash. With the last reserves of energy which we possessed, we circled the blazing remnants of the fallen pine. New fires sprang up in every direction which immediately leaped like live things in the wind to lick hungrily at the low-hanging branches of other trees. For a few moments we fought a losing battle. Then the wind dropped and we gained on these many fires. It was dawn when we had beaten out the last spark and left only the smoking boles and black limbs of these unfortunate trees as a monument to the most awful night we had ever spent.

We sat on that slope—the three of us—with our heads bowed over our knees, too weary to even speak. The dogs gathered around us from the many directions where they had fled before the fire. We were not at all certain at that time whether we would ever get back to the Bellote Ranch.

But the morning sun warmed us as before. There was some remnant of life left in our deadened legs as we dropped down into the canyon bottom below to find water. There in the still, cool shadows we drank deeply from a small seep beneath a granite rock. We washed the pine soot and ashes from our blackened faces and we even combed our hair. We felt better.

In the middle of the afternoon we found our horses where we had left them and took down our saddles and blankets from the tree. The horses, hungry as they were, had been revived somewhat by the long rest. We were indeed glad to climb into those saddles and let our weary legs merely dangle as we worked our way back to the Bellote Ranch.

It was midnight when we arrived and we were asleep in the saddles, leaning forward on the beasts' necks. Swede Parker had been worried and had waited up for us with a steaming pot of

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coffee ever ready. He met us at the gate where one of the horses had whinnied, or we would have fallen right there. I myself went to sleep in the middle of my second cup of coffee. I was too tired to notice what Frank or Mrs. Parker did.

And as I slept fully clothed with even my boots on, I dreamed a troubled dream. It seemed that my aching body would not let my mind rest even in this refuge. I dreamed that we pursued a lion which kept ever ahead of us. The harder we tried to catch this lion, the farther the beast kept its distance, and frequently the lion would turn in full view as though to antagonize us to greater efforts. I could see that this cougar apparition was long and lean with a scrawny neck and a small head. I awoke with a start. I had slept for fifteen hours.

Meanwhile, the Catalina Hellcat prowled the timbered ridges with her new mate. Two years later, they saw her again at the Bellote Ranch but as far as I know, this remarkable female was never caught. She stalks the Catalinas yet, uttering birdlike calls in the darkness.

CHAPTER V

THE KILLER OF TONTO RIM

THE Tonto Rim has always been a bloody place. Men have killed other men there and in one section—Bloody Basin—there have been killings and blood-lettings in the not-so-long-ago that would make any carnivore animal appear like a philanthropic and gentle being.

But at this particular time, just three months after my defeat on the Bellote Ranch, the bloodshed took the form of mangled deer and occasionally a calf or a colt. Hugh Wingfield had found three lion-killed deer while he was on a fishing expedition in the southern Tonto Rim country. Elias Powers, another rancher, told me later that he came across fresh deer kills every time he rode the rough country to the east of his ranch. Ranchers and forest rangers alike reported that this Tonto Rim area “was simply crawling with lions.” However, as the brakes and mountains of this Tonto Rim region are wild and for the most part unapproachable, no one paid any particular attention; that is, they didn’t until a lion killed two full-grown mules in the same area.

They were white mules that had apparently been turned out to graze after the ploughing season and had worked their way, as stray animals did, back into the rugged terrain of the Tonto Rim country where grazing was plentiful. They lay together just as the lion had killed them, not a hundred yards apart. As they were described to me by the forest ranger who had actually seen

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the carcasses, the poor beasts had apparently been killed on succeeding days and the lion had eaten the belly of each one—nothing more. These big, powerful mules, with their keen ears and high intelligence, had fallen as ready victims to the marauding lion as any other form of life in the woods. Those long lion teeth had crunched the backbones of the full-grown mules as easily as any deer. Both of the animals had been left partially covered up with pine needles and debris after the lion had eaten.

Perhaps this pair of white mules had been turned out to die in the National Forest. No one seemed to know exactly and no one would have particularly cared had they died a natural death. But their demise was far from natural and every rancher whose territory was anywhere near the Tonto Rim country mumbled through his chewing tobacco "that something sure would have to be done about them lions."

This was the state of affairs in the early 1930's when everyone was talking about lions, but no one had taken any particular action to alleviate what seemed a very bad situation. As in politics, there was much grumbling but nothing concrete. All of the available professional hunters in Arizona were elsewhere, busily engaged in mollifying other ranchers' complaints. It was useless to hunt the lions without dogs and the lions seemed amply secure in the abundantly rough country of this wild region. The matter was brought to a head by the Widow Weems.

This worthy woman had lived by herself in a small ranch in this same area ever since her husband had been shot and killed some years ago. Indeed, there is a preponderance of widows in this Arizona region. It seems that at least a decade or two ago few men died a natural death.

On one particular spring morning, Widow Weems had been awakened at dawn by the scream of a horse in her own corral. Horses seldom make this noise, but when they do it is one of the most terrifying sounds one can hear. It combines all of the agony and foreboding which humans can seldom put into sound. The Widow Weems had heard horses scream before when Apache arrows had bitten deep into the flanks of one of their wagon-team animals many years ago. When she heard this same terrifying sound in her own corral, she had wakened, wrapped a coat around herself, and taken a rifle from the wall all in the same motion.

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The Widow Weems was a very capable woman. I myself saw her handling a double-bitted axe with one hand while she split stove-wood. But on this occasion her strength did her little good. When the widow stepped out into the cold chilly air of early morning, she could see nothing. The faint dawn light gave only the barest outlines of the top poles of the corral. But within the enclosure the animals still milled and stamped in the darkness and their fear was infectious. Suddenly the widow thought she saw a dim outline, a bulky shape, loom above the top of the corral and then disappear on the far side. She raised her rifle and fired and a long blue flame jetted out from the muzzle in the darkness.

When the sun was up, the widow, still carrying her rifle, made a circle of her corral to see what was bothering her colts. It didn't need a wilderness-trained woman to tell what had happened. On the pounded dirt inside the corral was a little pool of black blood, hardening in the sun. The other horses stood huddled against the far side of the enclosure, terror still written in their eyes and actions. There was one animal missing—a yearling colt, a sorrel with a white star on his forehead. There was absolutely no sign of this animal. The yearling had disappeared entirely. But on the top pole of the corral wall, was a tuft of sorrel hair as though a body had been dragged over and dropped on the other side. There was blood too on the wood and the mark of claws.

The widow quickly climbed to the outside of the corral and there the story was written all too plainly. In the dust of the ranch yard were the unmistakable imprints of a large lion. Beside these tracks was a grooved furrow, as though something heavy had been dragged across the surface. Lions often drag their kills from the place of the death. This furrow led straight away across the clearing from the ranch house toward the brush and trees of the mountain slope beyond. Here and there along these straight lines where the heavy body had dragged, were tufts of sorrel hair and bits of blood left on stones and sticks.

Although the covering darkness of the still-early dawn had hidden this happening from all but the lion's eyes, the main events were manifest. The lion had killed the colt within the corral and had somehow, with a prodigious show of strength seized the animal in his teeth and jumped clear over the top of the corral with him. The body of the horse had indeed been dragged over the top-

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most pole, and the claw marks of the lion showed that he pulled and heaved to get the horse over. But it was a feat of wilderness strength nevertheless. Once out of the corral with his limp victim, the cougar had bitten deep into the back of the yearling's shoulder and had then lifted the whole body off of the ground as he walked along. Only the hind feet, and occasionally the hind quarter, of the unfortunate colt dragged beside the lion as he walked. The remarkable story was clearly told in the dust across the ranch house clearing.

The Widow Weems had gone back to the house and reinforced herself with a cup of coffee and several extra rifle shells. Tying her sunbonnet firmly on her white hair, she then set out to track the plain marks of the dragging colt into the forest. These were not hard to follow. It was perhaps a hundred yards to the shelter of the trees. Here the lion had apparently had some difficulty in dragging his kill beneath the lower wire of a fence, but negotiated this passage by getting on the other side and pulling the horse beneath by the head. Beyond the fence the lion had picked up his burden again and dragged him on as before.

Another hundred yards, beneath the darker trees, the Widow Weems went cautiously, poking her rifle barrel ahead of her. As she rounded a clump of brush, she saw the even outlines of the dead horse before her, lying at the mouth of a little gully that notched the side of the hill. Even as she looked the unfortunate colt seemed to move with convulsive jerks as though the animal were not quite dead.

A twig snapped and the head and foreshoulders of a large, male lion appeared above the belly of the horse carcass. The Widow Weems, pioneer woman of action though she was, was too astounded to move. As she stood there, holding back the bushes with one hand and her rifle in the other, the lion advanced a step and reared himself to place both forepaws on the body of his late victim. It was the action of ownership. Across the prone carcass of that dead colt the Widow Weems and the big lion stared at each other for an eternity.

In the Widow's own words, "Before I could collect myself, the varmint turned, and as he flipped backward, I fired, but so help me I missed him, and he weren't fifty feet away." By evening of

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that same day the Widow Weems' story was all over the country and a hunter had been sent for.

Giles Goswick is the Arizona hunter in whose territory these tragic events took place. This skillful follower of lions was hired by the Biological Survey, now the Fish and Wildlife Service, to take care of just such exigencies as this. Giles possessed a pack of capable dogs that were second to none in the country. Like all lion hunters whom I have met, Giles hunted because he loved it, not because it made him wealthy. Just as Frank Colcord, Giles Goswick neglected a perfectly good ranch to follow the lion trail. He had that same urge and love to hunt which I had found in all these men and in their dogs as well.

I joined Giles Goswick for this trip into the Tonto Rim country as I was especially anxious to follow up all stories of stock-killing lions which I had encountered. Ostensibly I wished to discover the exact nature of lion depredations against domestic animals. Actually, I think the thrill of the lion chase had captured me as much as any of the others.

We established our base camp somewhat to the south of Widow Weems ranch as we had arrived on the scene several days after her horse had been killed and those particular lion tracks had grown cold. To the south the Tonto Rim country fades into a wild riot of deep canyons and precipitous cliffs. Some of these gorges are a thousand feet in depth with scarcely a handhold or a ledge in all that distance.

These dissecting canyons make it almost impossible to use horses in such rugged terrain. A hunter would spend most of his time figuring out a way to get his horse up or down these canyon walls rather than in following the lion track. It was going to be a job on foot, then, and an arduous one. We had found before that the rougher the country, the better the lions seemed to like it. Giles and I had no doubt that we were going to catch lions here. Whether we were going to catch the actual killer that had frightened the Widow Weems was another consideration entirely.

The very first morning of the first day the dogs took a good track on the canyon rim close to our camp. We didn't catch this particular lion, but it showed us plainly what we had to face in this crumpled country. Old Red was the leader of Giles' dog pack and one of the most capable dogs I have ever seen. This dog had

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a Chesapeake Bay retriever among his ancestors; he was a chocolate brown, with a nose of the same color that looked like a bonbon. Red had stuck that capable nose down on the rock at the edge of a canyon rim and had given a long-drawn bark. The race was on.

Almost immediately the dogs dropped down over the canyon rim following the lion track in a perilous descent. We followed with great difficulty as we dropped down over ledges and slipped and slid down talus slopes with every foot of the way dangerous for both ourselves and our dogs. The lion track zigzagged down through these obstacles where apparently the cat had had no difficulty whatsoever. We had almost reached the bottom with the dogs a hundred yards or so ahead of us.

As Old Red and the rest of them came out on the canyon floor, there was a sudden roar of dog voices all together. Apparently as the hounds hit the bottom of the slope they had struck a fresh track. From our elevated position on the side of the canyon wall, we could see all of the dogs, running as hard as they could go down the floor of the canyon. All of them were in full cry and the narrowneck walls around us echoed and reverberated to the cry of the hounds when they have sighted their quarry.

Giles clenched my arm and pointed. There ahead of the running dogs was another figure, and it was not a lion. As this blurry form rounded out into the open beyond some trees, we could see it plainly. It was a black bear, and a big one. The bear climbed into the thick branches of a spruce tree just around a bend in the canyon below. But our lion hunting was done for that day. There are more hazards to this business than just cold tracks and cold night.

On the next succeeding days we took long circles in the rough country behind the Weems ranch to see if we could get the large lion which the widow had described so vividly to us. On the tenth day of this rugged work we struck a good track, a big track. This might be the one.

This particular lion chase started out commonly enough, but certainly didn't end that way. As before, the lion tracks seemed immediately to drop down into one of the precipitous canyons that dissected this rough country like tears in a piece of paper. The dogs, with ourselves after them, scrambled down over ledges

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and slopes in an almost straight drop to the bottom of one of these endless canyons. As near as we could tell, we thought we were on a tributary of Fossil Creek, so named because the sand-stone ledges and cliffs of that mighty gorge extruded a variety of fossils which would do credit to a paleontological museum. But the shadowed depths of Fossil Creek Canyon contained things even more interesting than fossil shells.

As Giles Goswick and I reached the bottom of the canyon, sliding down the last few feet of the drop on a wild grapevine, we found that we had come too far. The dogs were following along the canyon wall on a ledge above us. Where we stood, this canyon was only a few feet wide and was dark and mysterious even in midday. We had the apprehensive feeling that we were standing in the bottom of a well, as we could see only a jagged fragment of blue sky far above us.

Another peculiar sensation that we experienced was that sound was utterly deceptive in the depths of this narrow gorge. Our own voices echoed peculiarly and carried an eerie reverberation which made us stop between sentences. The dogs too, even though they uttered only scattered barks, sounded like lost demons howling in a Stygian world. The location of the dogs was almost impossible by sound alone. The peculiar turns and twists of the narrow canyon produced echoes and acoustic effects which completely destroyed the directional quality of any noise. We could see the wagging tails and the occasional forms of the dogs on the ledge above us, and yet the noise seemed to come from down the canyon behind us. It was an eerie place, a fit domain for some green-eyed killer that retired to their rocky depths to lick his jowls.

We progressed between these towering walls for perhaps two miles. In places the dark sandstone actually overhung us as we walked on the canyon floor. At no place did the narrow cleft open out more than fifty feet wide. Still the dogs trailed on the ledge above us. Suddenly they came to an end. There was no explanation for it. The conglomerate ledge which the dogs had been following for this distance was completely broken away where a huge column of sandstone had fallen from the canyon wall to shatter in rough chunks and fragments below. The break had occurred perhaps hundreds of years ago and had left a gap

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in the floor of the ledge which not even a lion could jump. And yet where had the cougar gone?

The dogs, as ourselves, looked first up the rock wall above the ledge and then down to the bottom of the canyon below. There seemed no way that the lion could have doubled back or jumped or slid to get past that impediment. The lion, as had his tracks, disappeared completely into the blue shadows of the depths of this lost canyon.

We shivered in spite of ourselves, although it was the middle of the afternoon. It was damp in the bottom of the canyon and there was a chill in the surroundings which was not entirely temperature. Giles called to his dogs to follow back along the ledge down the canyon to the point where we could all scramble up to the rim so high above us and into the wholesome sunshine of the upper world. The dogs followed peaceably enough. They seemed to realize that we had been following no ordinary lion that could suddenly disappear into hard rock and thin air.

As we walked back down the damp recesses of the canyon walls, we thought we could hear a faint noise, somewhat like the barking of a dog. Perhaps we had been listening for the baying of hounds for so long that there was a ringing in our ears in this mysterious place. "Just the wind, I guess," muttered Giles to himself, although I hadn't asked him any question about the noise that sounded so peculiarly. The dogs on the ledge above us were not making a sound. They were trooping back with all of the silence and dejection of dispirited animals who have failed in their mission.

There was the noise again. It came to us briefly and then faded away as the wind does around the eaves of an old house in winter. And yet there wasn't a breath of air in the bottom of the canyon. The damp walls stirred not the slightest, nor did any leaf from the occasional bushes that grew in clefts in the rock, move in any draft or breeze. The sound effects in that narrow canyon were the most mysterious I had ever encountered. As we walked down the floor of the gorge with our feet crunching on the wet gravel and slopping through occasional pools of water, we could still hear the barking of this mysterious dog. It did sound like a dog, but it must be an unearthly animal, for the sound rose and fell in cadences as it reached our ears.

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We reached the spot where we had descended into the canyon. It was going to be a difficult climb, as even here the canyon wall was steep and rose from ledge to ledge with slopes and cracks that were just barely scalable. We were also going to have to lift the dogs up some of the most difficult places. I had just grasped the wild grapevine which was the only way by which we could surmount the first ledge, when Giles said suddenly:

"Why, it's Smoky! He's not with the others. He must have the lion treed. Come on!" The rest of the dogs pricked up their drooping ears to the sound of Smoky's barking. The hound pack was scrambling down over the ledge and starting down the floor of the canyon in a new burst of enthusiasm. Apparently as the rest of the dogs and ourselves had been following phantom lion tracks up the canyon, Smoky alone had followed a trail down the gorge. His barks were coming quite plainly now, although still with that eerie quavering sound which we had noted before. If the rest of the dogs hadn't been so sure that Smoky and the quarry were below us, we would have been in doubt as to what direction to turn.

We dashed at a dead run down the rocky floor of that mysterious gorge. We could hear the other hounds ahead of us as they splashed through the water in the canyon pools. We jumped and scrambled over the occasional logs that lay shattered and broken here and there in the narrow cleft. We had gone perhaps five hundred yards when we stopped for breath on top of one of these dead trees that had crashed centuries ago from the rim far above us. The sound of the barking dog which must be Smoky, now sounded more distant than ever. The acoustics of this mysterious place would defeat us yet.

Giles and I were looking at each other hoping that the other would suggest some feasible plan by which we might unravel the mysteries of this shadowy place. We obviously couldn't spend all day running up and down the floor of this dark canyon chasing mysterious noises. Suddenly the voice of the phantom dog, dim and wavering in the distance, was augmented by the bark of another hound, then another. Still dim and uncertain in these dark depths, we could hear the hounds in a furious din of barking which blended into one long wail of sound that chased echoes up and down the sandstone walls around us. The noise of the

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hounds seemed to come from everywhere, and from all directions at once as though low-throated pipe organs were hidden in those solid sandstone walls themselves. But the rest of the dogs had gone down the canyon. "Come on," I yelled, as I slipped off the bog log and splashed through a pool of water beyond.

Giles and I ran as fast as the tumbled rocks and rough floor of the canyon would allow us. We had gone several hundred more yards. It was difficult to measure any distances because of the turns and twists of the canyon which seemed almost to double back on itself in places. We had just slowed to negotiate a particularly rough pile of tumbled sandstone blocks, when the barking of the hounds reached us in a sudden gust of sound as though a factory whistle had unexpectedly been blown beside us. We looked up to see the narrow crack of a tributary canyon which seemed to be the source of the dogs' barking.

Narrow as the canyon had been which we had been following, this side cleft was even narrower. As we entered the dark crack of the opening, we could almost touch our hands on either wall, and in places, the cliff seemed to come together completely above us, to shut out any vestige of sunlight that might filter down into these damp depths. As we worked our way cautiously up this crack, the noise of the dogs was almost deafening. It would have been terrifying if we had not known what it was. There was a rush and roar of sound that seemed to sweep over us like a high wind, confined and echoing in this sandstone cleft. It is no wonder that Smoky's single voice had played such tricks with our ears. Good old Smoky.

A few yards up the cleft it widened a little and the towering walls above us seemed to drop away to let in more light. There were even a few bushes growing in tiny toe-holds of cracks in the rocks. Still the dogs seemed to be farther on and above us. As we had climbed away from the main canyon, this little tributary seemed to be drier and the sand and stones beneath our feet showed the traces of only occasional moisture of some mountain storm or sporadic winter snow that might filter down into these depths.

Giles was ahead trying to find a lion track or some sign of what we were following in the patches of sand on the floor of the little canyon.

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"Giles," I called, unconsciously pointing my hand. "Look up there—to the left. Up there in that shadow." Giles looked, expecting, no doubt, to see a cougar lying at full length on the ledge above him. But my excitement at that particular moment was not occasioned by a lion, or even the excited barking of the dogs a short distance ahead. Just above us and shaded by the overhanging cliff of the canyon wall, was a cave, or rather two caves, one above the other. The lower one looked black and inviting even in this mysterious sandstone kingdom of blue shadows and echoing noises. In the mouth of the cave was a fragment of man-made masonry with the adobe mortar showing plainly and the small square of an ancient window outlined black against the gloom beyond. The cave had been used as a habitation and a refuge by ancient man. Giles Goswick and I were not the first ones to walk in these sandstone gorges.

Even with the excitement of a lion kill just ahead we scrambled up a moment to examine the cave. With little difficulty we surmounted the low ledge before its mouth and stood in the entrance. The masonry walls which these ancient fellows had built up across the entrance so long ago, had largely broken away and fallen to the floor of the canyon. But there still remained fragments of the walls and partitions which had made the cave a habitation place. Fingerprints of long-dead fingers could be clearly seen in the adobe mortar where it had been tamped between the sandstone fragments.

In one corner of the ancient place, a pack rat had made his home and had heaped a quantity of sticks, pine cones, and cactus spines. Perched on top of this accumulation was a yucca sandal with the ties and strings which had bound it to those ancient feet, still intact. The twilled surface of this prehistoric footgear was worn, however, and there was a hole at the heel. Doubtless the owner, dead for the last eight or nine thousand years, had thrown it back over his shoulder into the dark recesses of this cave a long time ago.

But it was not the cave below, with its fragments of jagged masonry and black window, which was the most startling discovery of this mysterious sandstone cleft. It was the cave above. The opening of this upper cave lay perhaps fifty feet above us. It seemed a small aperture, not large enough for any human habi-

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tation and merely a place where the sandstone had spalled off in an arcuate manner as is typical of this geological formation. In this arched opening, as our eyes became more accustomed to the shadow, we could see a number of sticks protruding outward in all directions. But these did not seem to be ordinary sticks. As a matter of fact, they were bound with bands of dark material and here and there we thought we could detect rings of blue and yellow color.

"Giles! They're arrows!" I said excitedly, as we backed off to get a better view. They were indeed arrows. We could see clearly some of the lower ones now, and make out the feathers bound on their ends and the stripes of color with which they were decorated.

Giles unwound his lariat rope which he carried wrapped around his middle. With a deft toss of the loop, he threw it above us into the mass of bristling arrows sticking from the upper cave. The loop barely reached to the lowermost of the shafts protruding from the opening, but as the end whipped out, it knocked three of them loose and they fell lightly to our feet. We picked them up eagerly to examine them. They were wooden arrows—very ancient ones—perfectly preserved in the dryness and protection of the cave. They were fitted with three feathers and a notch in the conventional manner to take the bowstring. The major part of the shaft was of cane, and most remarkable of all, the points were of wood, long and tapering.

As we looked up again at the cave above us, we roughly estimated that there must be two or three hundred of the shafts protruding from the little opening. Perhaps they were shot from across the canyon to stick in the little cave above the cliff house. If the arrow remained, a prayer would be answered. I had heard of such ceremonial places, but never seen one before. Certainly there would be no reason for sticking arrows in a place such as this other than some religious one.

As though for a few moments Giles and I had forgotten where we were or why we were there, suddenly the noise of the dogs burst again upon our consciousness with a deafening insistence. Undoubtedly the excited animals had been barking the whole time we had been examining the cache of arrows. But the tracks and traces of ancient men and the arrow cave which they had

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left behind them was so fascinating that we had momentarily forgotten the killer of the Tonto Rim.

We laid the arrows carefully away with the sandal on a ledge in the lower cave and continued on up the little canyon toward the dogs. A few yards farther was another cave, almost like the first and showing the remnants of ancient masonry with which it had been walled up. Leaning diagonally against the rock wall almost beside this cave was a gnarled and withered spruce tree which reached up with distorted and battered limbs for the light which filtered so meagerly between these narrow sandstone walls. As we saw the dogs barking and jumping furiously around this old spruce tree, we knew we had reached the end of a mysterious hunt.

Giles and I came practically beneath that twisted spruce before we saw the lion. It was a large male, a big beast with dark gray peltage and an almost black tail. The cougar lay at full length in a thick outgrowth of diseased spruce limbs, where some falling rock had injured the struggling tree long ago. In the shadows of the approaching evening we could make out only the dim outlines of his body and the movement of the tip of his tail, as the beast curled it back and forth in a movement either of bravado or apprehension. The green eyes of the lion seemed to reflect the faint light in the bottom of the canyon, and intensify it, as though those wicked orbs were lighted from within by a killer's fire.

There was no time for pictures or speculations. Giles raised his rifle. The deafening crack of that capable weapon must have been the first such sound that those sandstone walls had ever echoed. It certainly was not the first time that death had come to that narrow place. As the limp form of that magnificent lion slumped out of the old spruce tree and dropped to the rocks below, we felt again that feeling of apprehension which had seized us before. Even the dogs seemed to be nervous and chewed for only a few brief moments on the carcass of the lion that had caused them so much trouble and work. The body of the cougar was awe-inspiring even in death. If this was not the killer of the Tonto Rim that had so frightened the Widow Weems, it was certainly one just like it.

I never saw the good Widow Weems again. I heard later that

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she was vastly pleased at the demise of the big lion which lived in the gorges. Ever since our mysterious hunt in those haunted places I have thought of that particular lion as being something special. It was not his size, although he was a large male. The long-deserted cliff house in the narrow canyon with the ceremonial arrow cave above it created an atmosphere of antiquity which was not ordinary background for any cougar. Perhaps this lion was the reincarnation of one of the old cliff dwellers prowling yet the tumbled masonry and the dark caves of his forefathers.

CHAPTER VI

PORCUPINE CAT

MINGUS MOUNTAIN is a flat-topped affair. Its long narrow bulk divides, as though by divine command, the mining provinces of Jerome, Arizona and the town of Cottonwood on one side and the frontier cattle-ranching community of Prescott on the other. In spite of the ponderous mass of Mingus Mountain that forms this barrier, Arizona engineers had long ago cut with their steam shovels and bulldozers through the lava rims of Mingus Mountain to form a road over the summit.

Not content with this man-made scar that cuts the ancient form of Mingus Mountain practically in the middle, these same human animals had dug mining shafts and projected audacious mining roads into the canyon bottoms and even along the beetling crags of the Mingus cliffs. The mining community of Jerome itself is perched on the very side of this remarkable mountain. The angle of the streets in that interesting town would frighten even a resident of San Francisco. It is perhaps significant that even now these same zigzag stair-step avenues of Jerome are slipping foot by foot down the side of the mountain. It may be that old Mingus will conquer the defacing marks of man after all.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this incongruous mixture of man and nature is to be found on the flat-top summit of the mountain. Here among the lofty pines these same humans have, in the last few years, cut winding trails and forest roads through the pine needles. These do not lead to any ranch or mine, but

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end only in pleasant vistas and picnic places. This was a recreational development where busy groups of ambitious humans changed the stately Mingus forest with stone fire places, picnic benches, garbage pits, and play pens for errant children. It seemed that mankind in its wisdom was not content with digging in the bowels of Mingus Mountain for copper metal, but must lay the works of his play hours on the mountain as well.

This was a peculiar situation in which to find an animal so furtive and wild as a mountain lion, but there he was. A cattle man from Cherry Valley came into the ranch yard of Giles Goswick one afternoon and asked for the famous lion hunter. Goswick's hounds had been chained to their respective posts for 10 days or more and seized upon this happy occasion to greet the stranger with a deafening chorus of barks and howls as if they knew the nature of his errand. Even Old Red, with his chocolate-drop nose, got upon his venerable old feet and barked at the stranger approvingly.

"Shore was a lion," I could hear the man saying in between the din of the hounds. "Found a kill and believe it or not, Giles, it was a porcupine, skinned out slicker than a whistle."

I saw Giles start into the ranch house with that quick business-like step that he used only when he had something urgent on his mind. To Giles Goswick there was nothing ever urgent except a lion hunt. Especially was he reluctant to enter a house, even his own. Many a night, during my visit at the Goswick ranch, Giles slept outside in the yard with his hounds. "Too stuffy," he had said: "Can't stand the bad air." And yet I had noticed that at that particular time in the Goswick fortunes, their ranch house was so lightly constructed that enough wind passed clear through the old building to make the flame of a kerosene lamp exceedingly unsteady.

Giles reappeared from the house in a few seconds with his short-barreled .30-30 under his arm. I was already helping the lion hounds into the pick-up truck. Giles, the hounds and everyone concerned were delighted at the prospect and barked or talked excitedly according to their kind.

Mingus Mountain, with its made-over appearance, came as something of a surprise. As we drove the little truck down one of the recreation roads on the summit we could scarcely imagine

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that a lion would stay there. The pines, with their red bark, grew in an open park-like manner. There was a cultivated appearance to the forest which was not entirely the fault of the picnic benches that we passed on either side. Through the trees we could see a distant curl of smoke that must be one of the smelters in the valley. As we stopped the truck and stepped out among the trees, a whistle, evidently in the town of Jerome below the edge of the mountain, announced noon. We had made a late start.

Our friend from Cherry Valley had given us very exact directions. Holding back the dogs as they escaped, eager and barking, from the tail-gate of the truck, we endeavored to keep their enthusiasm as much under control as possible by keeping them behind us. We had eight hounds, veterans and novices, with us that day and that number of dogs can make an amazing number of tracks ahead of you. "You got to keep them corralled," Giles was saying, as we approached the rim-rock on the edge of the mountain where we hoped to find the track.

From that height we could see the Verde Valley below us as though it were drawn on a map. There were towns and roads and yet in the distance, somehow, they didn't look quite so blatant or out of place. "Look there," Giles was saying, pointing to a pine tree that grew at the very edge of the rock. Beneath the tree was a lion scrape, a big one. We could still see the paw marks of the last big cat that had passed that way. It was also obvious that other lions in the past months or years, had scraped in this same spot. The pile of pine needles and small sticks accumulated was as big as a wash tub. Green lion eyes had paused to look out over the same view that we now contemplated.

The dogs were around our feet now, sniffing eagerly. Old Red and Smoky had obviously found some straying remnants of lion smell on the old scrape—not enough to draw from them the excited bark of a hound who has found a trail. Smoky wagged the last half of his tail with some vestige of excitement and Red lifted his ears a little. The old, chocolate-colored dog turned and grinned sheepishly at us as he panted in the noon-day heat. Mingus Mountain was a dud. Well, what could we expect in a picnic place. Anyway, the view was good.

We had just turned away with the thought that possibly we might hit a lion trail on the other end of Mingus Mountain, for

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at least it was wilder country. Two or three of the dogs were just getting up from their positions in the shade. Suddenly there was the long-drawn double bark of a hound on the trail. It sounded distant and unreal in the heat waves. Our dogs were all with us—No! Old Blue was missing! We ran back again to the edge of the rimrock and peered over. There was another bark, this time loud and distinct as the sound came up the face of the cliff. Blue had somehow found his way below the rimrock and was hunting among the scattered trees on the steep slope. “Lion!” Giles said as he sprinted down the edge of the cliffs to find a place where we too could get off.

The rest of the dogs had disappeared from around our feet like magic. We could just see their waving tails ahead of us through the pine trees as they too raced to get in on the excitement below the cliff. We found a small gully with some talus and debris in its base which enabled us to slide amid a shower of dust and small stones down through the rimrock. Ahead, along the steep slope, another dog and yet another joined Old Blue on the track. It must be a hot one.

Giles Goswick had stopped ahead of me and was looking at something that lay on the ground. One of the young pups was also sniffing in a tentative manner, as though interested and at the same time afraid. I knew that Giles was anxious to find the lion track and see if the hounds were running it forward or backward. I stumbled and slid along the steep slope to see what this something could be. At first it looked like a piece of blue wrapping paper stretched out on the ground. Then I saw the stubby tail, armed with the long yellow quills. It was a porcupine skin, stretched out flat on the dirt as though it had been done by a man and skinned with a knife. There was not a hint of a tear or abrasion in the even surface of the pelt, although all four feet were missing.

I stooped and moved the thing with my hand, being careful to avoid the quills that stuck out from the underside. The skin was only slightly stiff, even in the dry heat of midday. “Must have been killed last night,” I said to Giles over my shoulder as I held back the stupid hound pup from the porcupine skin. Giles nodded. I carefully picked up the remnants of the porcupine by the inside of the skin and hung it in the fork of a tree, well above

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my head. We wanted no foolish hounds with quills stuck in their noses.

But the hounds, at least the veterans, had more urgent work to do than nosing dead porcupines. The babble of dog voices as they followed the track had already rounded a shoulder of the mountain and was again sounding distant. We must hurry. The hot afternoon on that mountain slope made the ordinary work of a lion chase arduous indeed. The heat waves danced up from the scattered black rocks which lay in profusion on the steep slopes. The footing on the incline of Mingus Mountain was uncertain and the tendons of arms and legs were constantly stretched taut to prevent a disastrous descent.

In a dusty spot beneath an overhanging ledge of the cliff, the lion had turned in as though to rub his arching back against the projecting rock like any house cat. Here in the quiet dirt we saw the print of a big cat paw. We were going the right way and the track looked burning fresh, although it is difficult to tell in dry dust. But if the hounds ran the lion that well in this heat, we should not be far behind him.

On a low spur ridge on the flank of the mountain we found the second porcupine. This was an older kill and we probably wouldn't have noticed it at all had it not been for the stupid puppy that still stayed with us. The poor little chap seemed to realize that he was expected to do something, but was not as yet old enough in the ways of hunting hounds to run with the rest of the pack ahead. And yet he possessed that same keen hunter's nose that would one day make him a famous trailer of cougars like his father. The soulful-eyed little pup with his long trailing ears had simply lifted his head into the faint hot breeze that stirred up the side of the mountain, and trotted off into the trees. I had seen hounds act this way before and if you followed quickly enough, you could always find dead meat.

This porcupine kill lay just as the first one we had found, although it apparently had been disturbed by coyotes. The animal itself had been skinned out of its hide with the same clean precision; only the head and tail were left and in this case, the feet. We tossed the skin down over a rocky ledge to keep it away from the too-anxious hound puppy, who apparently had conceived the notion that he ought to wrestle with the thing.

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As we climbed back to keep up with the dogs, we speculated with panting breath how the lion had killed these animals. The porcupine's bristling quills are defense enough against almost any other animal, and yet lions, or at least this lion, seemed to have killed them with ease. We speculated that these porcupines had probably all been killed by the same big cat. We had noticed before that mountain lions have a tendency to return past old kills. It seems almost like the avowed predilection of a criminal re-visiting the scene of his crime.

"He gets at 'em from the belly side," Giles was saying. "But what I can't see is how he turns 'em over on their backs in the first place." The thought of the porcupine I had seen bristling with straight-standing quills which they presented to a hostile world, seemed to leave no vulnerable direction from which they could be attacked. Dogs invariably have a disastrous time in encounters with these spiny animals, and if the porcupine ever gets in a slap of his quill-studded tail, any attacker is effectively discouraged.

"That is something I would like to see," I said to Giles as I pulled myself up the slope, holding on to the small trees.

The dog pack had made a momentary lose in a little rocky side canyon. The check apparently was caused when the lion had doubled on his own track for a short distance and leaped on top of a rocky ledge above. The dogs milled excitedly around, panting with protruding tongues. The sweating pads of their feet made momentary wet tracks on the hot surfaces of the rocks. But the heat of that Arizona afternoon evaporated the moisture almost at once.

It was Old Red, with his ridiculous chocolate-colored nose, that straightened out the kink that the lion had made. The check did give us an opportunity to catch up to the dogs. With Old Red in the lead, the dogs showed us where the lion had mounted from ledge to ledge to regain the summit of the rimrock and the top of Mingus Mountain. By the time we stood again among the yellow pines above, we were perspiring in buckets and breathing in gasps.

One and then another of the dogs would drop out for a few moments and lie panting in the shade of a tree. Just ahead of us was one of the picnic spots that now decorate the top of this in-

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teresting mountain. The dogs followed the way the lion had gone between two conventional picnic benches and passed an elaborately-made garbage disposal pit. Giles and I stopped a moment and stretched out full length on a picnic table to recoup our failing enthusiasm.

Just beyond the recreation spot we found another dead porcupine, or the remains of one. Apparently here too the lion had passed by an old kill that he had made days or weeks before. But the lion tracks led on along the edge of Mingus Mountain. Certainly the track was fresh, or the hounds couldn't have followed it at all.

Early in the afternoon the panting dogs led us on the trail of the porcupine cat along the edge of the mountain directly above the mining town of Jerome. It looked so tantalizingly close with its man-made houses and smoke stacks plastered on the side of the mountain like a swallow's nest.

Giles Goswick and I were by this time panting as heavily as the dogs and feeling acutely the weight of the gun and the camera that we carried. Even as we looked longingly toward the outlying buildings of the town, the lion trail turned straight down the mountain toward it as though the cat too had wanted a closer view of the habitation of men. The mountain lion had paused for a moment on a cutback overlooking the road with the nearest buildings of Jerome not more than a mile away.

Giles said, "I've got an idea," and started down the slope toward the town with a burst of energy which he had not displayed since the chase began. It was an easy swing down that steep incline to a small store or supply house for miners. Giles, I think, was disappointed that they didn't have any beer, but we did get a heaping dish of strawberry ice cream apiece. Between cooling gulps of this wonderful stuff we laughed together over the incongruous aspect of this most novel of lion hunts. Never before had we followed so luxurious a lion. On the Mingus Mountain chase we had had special chairs to sit on and picnic benches to lie on. We could throw our debris in special garbage pits of the latest design. And in the middle of the chase have a heaping dish of strawberry ice cream. I shall never forget how good it tasted.

The climb back up that mountain slope undoubtedly undid

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all of the good that the ice cream had accomplished. Also, we were afraid for some time that our bravado had lost us a lion. The hot breeze that was coming stronger with every passing minute from the valley, was beginning to make hearing extremely difficult. The sun-soaked pine needles whispering together in the wind sounded like the distant baying of hounds in every direction at once.

There is something in human anticipation that creates those things that we most desire out of the forms that nature furnishes us. I had noticed many times before that when we were straining for the sound of the dogs, running water, or whispering trees invariably sounded like the cry of the hounds. In this particular case we thought that we could even distinguish the voice of Old Red and Smoky and Blue. But as we listened intently it became evident that the noise was only that of the wind whispering up over the lava rocks to move the pine trees around us with soft mountain sounds.

"Giles, we're dished," I remember saying. And in that very instant I caught the slightest flicker of a motion on a distant ridge. It was a white thing that moved an instant and was gone. I was certain that it was the white part of a black and white hound that had stood out so unnaturally amid the greens and blacks and browns of Mingus Mountain.

We hurried along the edge of the mountain to the spot on the side ridge where I had thought I had seen a dog cross over. Even before we reached the place we heard the unmistakable reverberation of our faithful trackers still on the trail. Some of their voices were beginning to sound hoarse and the long-drawn barks carried a shade less enthusiasm than before. On that hot afternoon we would have to catch the porcupine cat quickly or we wouldn't catch him at all.

The hounds treed the lion in a half-dead old pine. We were all glad when it happened and especially since it seemed the culmination of one of the most bizarre hunts in which we had ever engaged. Several of the dogs lay down around the lion tree and barked as they lay. Old Red only, in spite of the heat, sat at the very foot of the pine tree and gazed up at the lion with a wilful stare that only a hound can achieve. This was the end of the

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hunt for him, the goal which had lured him over those many hot rocks and up the steep slopes.

The lion himself was apparently a young male, full grown and in the prime of life. He didn't look remarkably different from other lions we had seen, although perhaps his neck was a trifle longer than most. The porcupine cat, for so we had called this particular cougar, was as winded as any of the rest of us. His breath came in heaving gasps from his furred chest and the innocent-looking pink petal of his tongue protruded from between his pointed killer teeth. He half-closed his eyes as he panted, like a sleepy house cat, and a fleck of cotton foam drifted from the corner of his mouth.

Only occasionally did the lion turn and look down at the dogs, especially at Old Red, who sat at the foot of the tree like an image of death. The lion never wasted a look or apparently a thought on us, as we too slumped in the shade of a tree to take stock of the situation. A truce between the enemies had been momentarily called.

We could see from where we sat that the lion was sleek and perhaps overfed. His stomach seemed distended and as he had run only a short distance before the dogs, the chances were that he had fed very recently. We suspected what that meal had been.

After we had regained our breath for a few moments, I took some photographs and Giles occupied himself with encouraging the young dogs to bark at the tree. He carefully pointed out to these pups where the lion had rubbed the bark of the rough pine as it had climbed up. Here the lion smell was strong and telling to their keen noses. Then by throwing sticks at the lion on the limb above us, the young dogs' attention could be riveted on the quarry. Occasionally during these operations, the lion above showed resentment and pulled his lips back in a terrifying snarl with a steamy hiss to accompany it. This only seemed to excite the hounds further, however, and the drama went on.

As Giles worked with his dogs, I climbed a nearby tree to get a better shot. We talked as we worked of the peculiar habits of this ordinary-looking lion, in killing porcupines. Giles was especially interested in other records I had collected of what lions actually did eat. We had known, of course, from the onset, that the major food of the mountain lion was deer. I had carefully

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tabulated all of the information from many hunts and had found that some 78 per cent of the lion's food economy was venison of various varieties. In observing the meat-eating habits of the big American cat we had been astounded to discover that a very small percentage of lion kills was domestic stock. Less than 2 per cent were cattle, sheep, horse or goats.

And yet as we trailed these great cats through the mountains of New Mexico and Arizona, we were constantly in ranch country. Often on these lion tracks we had passed herds of cattle, grazing or lying down beneath the trees, seemingly undisturbed by passing lions. Why would the predatory cougar pass up so succulent a tidbit as a calf to hunt down a difficult porcupine? Why stalk a fleet-footed deer when a lumbering cow was easier to procure? The answer is probably a natural desire which amounts to instinct to hunt deer. Only occasionally did the mountain lions seem to turn to other food, although their potential killing power—their muscles, teeth, claws and ferocity—would have enabled them to kill anything in the woods.

From all of this information, gathered on the chase and collected from hunters such as Giles Goswick, it developed that mountain lions killing porcupines was not a rare occurrence. About 8 per cent of the food evidences of mountain lions that we found were those of the quill-covered porcupine, presumably immune. We wondered with many a hypothesis on those lion trails how the cougars got at the soft under-belly of the porcupine. A successful technique they must have had, and apparently all lions, on occasion, dined on porcupine meat. But the cougar of Mingus Mountain apparently did so habitually. He was the only lion we ever found that seemed to have made a habit of this difficult business.

I found ample evidence, during these many wanderings, that lions could and did eat practically anything in the woods. We found lion meals of skunk, apparently relished by the big cat, in spite of the odoriferous difficulties involved. We found evidences that lions had eaten foxes, jack-rabbits, and prairie dogs. Frank Colcord told me of a cougar he had followed that had killed and eaten half a coyote and buried the other half. Elliott Barker told me of a lion in his experience that had stalked a beaver. Another had appropriated an elk that hunters had killed. Giles Goswick

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told me, as we worked there with his hounds on Mingus Mountain, how he had found where one lion had killed another and had indulged in cannibalism on the spot. "I have the tail of the dead lion to prove it," he said with a wry smile.

"Giles," I said as I hung precariously on a pine limb above him. "It looks as though these lions can and do kill most anything that walks or runs in the mountains." I looked across the few feet to where the lithe form of the now thoroughly rested porcupine cat was poised for action, the bunched muscles of the shoulder, as the lion pressed low against the branch on which he lay, told all too well of the power that lay within that lethal fore-paw. I could even see from my elevated perch the curved claws as the lion alternately bared them and drew them back, like the deadly tongues of so many lethal serpents. A low growl rumbled from his chest as he looked down on a young hound that was now leaping excitedly below him.

The pup had apparently just grasped an inkling of what was expected of him and was barking and bouncing around excitedly as though he felt that he had treed the porcupine cat single-handed. As the other hounds were hoarse from constant barking, the little pup was holding the center of that forest stage. I shuddered as I thought what those raking claws could do to the soft belly of that enthusiastic young dog. The mountain lion is a killer, but one which did not seem to realize his potentialities; a predator which could kill a horse with a single bite through the neck or a buck deer with the largest set of antlers in the woods, could kill anything that crossed his path.

I felt almost sorry for the lion crouching there on the limb. He could have killed every one of the dogs that now held him at bay. He could have killed us for that matter. The mountain lion is that poor member of the foremost team that has the sharpest teeth and the faintest spirit of them all. Clever at killing porcupines as the Mingus Mountain lion, he had let himself be treed and brought to bay by a puny pack of barking dogs.

Giles leveled his rifle for the end of the drama. The sun was already slanting through the pine trees and the afternoon wind had some hint of coolness in it. It was time to be going. I could see the little spurt of dust and hair as the bullet bit through the white neck of the waiting cougar above us. That menacing head

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seemed to fold on itself and the whole frame of the lion, with his mighty killer muscles, tensed and quivered a few seconds in contemplation perhaps, of the things which the cat had not accomplished in its life span.

Then the tawny frame grew limp of a sudden and sagged from the pine limb like a bag of wet clothes to hit a sodden heap among the snarling dogs. There were horrifying growls and the rumble of angry hound voices as each of them seized a foot or a piece of lion hide to vent his anger on the fallen enemy. It was hardly believable that these were the same soulful-eyed long-eared hounds that had licked my face only a few minutes before. These were the gentle creatures with whom I had slept on many an occasion. Now each one seemed a demon with his lips rolled back to show his rows of teeth. It takes but the right stimulus and a second of time to change a gentle nature into a beast.

In between the thrashing, growling forms of the dogs I could catch momentary glimpses of the twitching lion's tail, or the blood-streaked white of his throat and muzzle. The porcupine cat was stone dead, but as the hound pack pulled him back and forth between themselves, he seemed to come to life again and lunged and pitched as though in his last battle.

We skinned the lion of Mingus Mountain quickly for it was already growing dark. On his chest and forepaws were perhaps a dozen porcupine quills. None of these were freshly embedded. Each quill had worked sideways so as to lie beneath the skin and around each there had accumulated a coating of cartilaginous material to render it harmless. The porcupine cat of Mingus Mountain had not always escaped the thrashing tail of his victims.

In the belly of this interesting lion were the fetid remnants of dark meat. At first we thought that this last meal had been the usual venison, but then there rolled out of the sticky mess, the clenched feet and paws of a porcupine. The last animal that this cougar had eaten was the porcupine that we had first found minus the paws. What eating pleasure the lion could have derived from gnawing off and gulping down these hard remnants, it is difficult to say. Perhaps the fatty tissue in the pads of the porcupine feet has an appealing taste for an eccentric cougar. At all events, the famous lion of Mingus Mountain killed porcupines for his food and he seemed to be good at it.

CHAPTER VII

COPPERAS CANYON LIONESS

THE blizzard raged all that night. The snow was powdery and drove across the top of the ridge like fine birdshot. The wind itself cut like a knife and moved the driving snow with a steely, humming sound among the trees. This was in the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico, a southern latitude, but on that February night it might have been the Arctic Circle.

The morning dawned a sickly gray light. We bestirred ourselves in the little tent as usual, although the prospects for lion hunting seemed to be dim. We had visitors in the lion camp—Eleanor and Kay—fresh from the east and anxious to imbibe all of the western adventures possible in their stay. The Arctic night which we had just survived appeared to them an integral part of western camping.

I had awakened a dozen times—when I heard the wind pulling in fierce gusts at the tent ropes; once when the flaps blew open and a bucketful of cold snow that had drifted before the entrance came in all at once. Then about midnight or later, I heard the horses shifting in the storm and dark outside, looking for shelter and a bite of something to eat. It was one of those nights that are described as unfit for man or beast. If the horses drifted before the wind and left for the lowlands, we would be in a bad spot.

But our young dude visitors had slept like tops. Apparently the cold and the vicious wind had merely stimulated them and

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they rolled out of their sleeping bags in that gray dawn eager for any action that the day might bring. Homer Pickens had gone to Silver City to visit his wife for a few days and the eastern girls had joined me in the lion camp. But what a time they had picked for a visit; the worst blizzard that the Mogollon Mountains had seen for years.

That morning we tried to make biscuits and the dough froze in the wash pan even as we kneaded it. The hard pellets of snow seemed to sift in everywhere and even the warmth of the fire was whipped away by the wind. We crouched around the small blaze with our heads hunched on one shoulder against the storm as though we all had unilateral paralysis.

I don't recall exactly what we ate, or if we ate anything. I only remember that Kay was in excellent spirits and that I was very much worried. We had located our camp with an eye toward convenience in hunting the Mogollon lions rather than protection from vicious weather. The little tent before which we crouched was on the very top of the ridge between Copperas Canyon and the Gila River. The wide sweep of wind that gutted our fire and sent the sparks flying with the driving storm, came all the way from the broad snow fields of Mogollon Baldy itself. It was a terrifying morning.

"Girls, we have to get off this ridge. If this snow and wind keep up, we'll all freeze to death." I was amazed at my own severity. It sounded like some veteran Arctic explorer giving sage advice to a couple of girl scouts. But whether I was stepping out of character or not, the cold probing fingers of that awful wind were driving hard snow through the gaps in my jacket which had been torn by a thousand raking oak limbs and branches on previous hunts. A western sombrero seemed inadequate indeed to protect the ears and the neck from such weather.

"Get that camp stuff together," I told the girls, "I'll see if I can find the horses."

I only found one of the sturdy horses that we counted on for our lion-hunting activities. Why this animal had not sensibly set out for the Sapello Valley like his companions, I will never know. He was tail to the wind, hunched over and with his head down. He looked exactly as I felt, cold and miserable and weary.

A few yards farther on I found Peter Mule, the fat, pot-bellied

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imp that we used as our pack animal when we made an extended trip in the mountains. Peter Mule was an outstanding personality and had the advantageous facility of keeping his distended little stomach continuously full no matter what the vicissitudes of a rigorous trip might be. On this occasion his fat seemed to serve him in good stead, for he looked less miserable than we, although he too stood with his butt to the snow and the gale.

I led both the horse and the mule back toward the camp. It terrified me to see how easily I might lose direction. In the slanting swirl of the driving snow all the trees seemed to look the same. The rise and fall of the header canyons and the hillocks of the ridge on which we were encamped looked different and obscure. The visibility could have been no more than fifty yards. Fortunately I stumbled across the scattered remnants of an old pole corral which had been built there years ago to catch wild horses. I knew the spot well. I had often left my saddle on that protruding log which slanted out from the wreck in earlier and warmer days. And yet the hundred and fifty or so yards back to the little tent were like navigating in a fog.

I was almost beside the girls before I could see the flare of the wind-whipped fire. The two animals that I led on my lariat protested and pulled back on the rope over my elbow. I think they both would have turned and scattered before the wind if I had not tied them securely. They blinked their eyes from time to time to shake off the particles of hard snow that lodged there. Man is a very foolish animal, I thought. We all might have been comfortable in some low-land pasture or civilized place instead of braving a Mogollon gale on a wind-swept ridge. I warmed the bits of the two bridles carefully by the fire. The ice-cold iron could easily freeze to tender skin and strip it raw. Even the leather of the head bands and reins was stiff and cracked in my hands. It was the coldest morning that I ever remember in that part of New Mexico.

Somehow we got the pack saddle on the bad-tempered mule and cinched it tight enough to stay on his arched and protesting back. We saddled the horse and tied the camera behind the saddle and put the rifle in a stiff scabbard already half full of snow. We packed but little of the camp goods; only our beds and these lashed on somehow with a diamond hitch that I hoped Homer

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Pickens would never see. We mounted Kay on the horse (the girls had decided to take turns riding) still saying that she wanted to go lion hunting as that is what she came to do. I'm afraid I was grim, if not actually surly in my replies to these sallies, as I led the pack mule and the little entourage in an ignominious retreat down off that terrible ridge.

It may have been the middle of the morning when we dropped into the head of Copperas Canyon and some degree of grateful shelter from the wind. Here there was an old trail which led, farther down, into a road that had once reached up Copperas Canyon to a mine where some long-forgotten miner was said to have made a fortune in days gone by. Now I was grateful for this trail and road as they marked plainly the way down and out of the suddenly unfriendly mountains. With the exercise of brisk walking and the wind at our backs, even my spirits began to rise somewhat. In the bottom of the canyon and among the timber the wind was less and the snow fell in a more perpendicular fashion as snow ought to do. But on the crests of the comb ridge above us we could still see the pine tops tossed and lashed by the blizzard which raced through their branches.

It was a ghostly march in the wintry light of that miserable morning. There were none of the familiar sounds of horses on the trail. There was no creak of saddle leather and the layer of snow underfoot deadened the sound of hoofs and footfalls. Even our occasional voices seemed far away and talking was difficult. This was a time when the hunter thinks of the wild animals of the woods. Where do they go in times like these and how do they survive the stinging cold of the blizzard?

As I walked ahead of the train I became gradually conscious that I was following a set of tracks in the snow. Tracks! The import of the thing struck me suddenly. With this sifting snow the tracks must be minutes old and these imprints looked round and familiar. I bent down on one knee so suddenly that Peter Mule behind me almost stepped on my foot. Then with an irritated toss of his head, he sent me sprawling in the snow. This was a nasty habit of the little pack mule when the person ahead of him did not move fast enough.

I did not even pause to resent this indignity, however. There in the broken snow ahead of me were the round tracks of a grown

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lion. There was no mistaking those imprints with the three characteristic lobes at the rear of the tracks. There was only a dusting of snow particles in the impressions. I remember that with this realization I lifted my head to stare into the murk of dusky snow down the canyon to see if I could make out the dark bulk of a big cat. The lion was close ahead, but not quite close enough. The girls had stopped behind me when Peter Mule had halted so abruptly.

I was still staring down the canyon when Eleanor, pointing to one side of the trail, said in a nature-lover's voice, "Look at the cute little bobcat tracks!" I looked where she pointed, three or four yards to my left, and sure enough, there were the round imprints of little cat tracks, leading down the canyon in the same direction as those where I stood. "Bobcat tracks! That's a baby lion," I fairly yelled with rising excitement. "Here are the tracks of the female and she has a kitten with her—a young one. Come on! We'll catch them! They must be just ahead or we couldn't see the tracks at all in this snow."

Only then did I realize with a sinking feeling that we did not have the dogs. Homer had taken them to Silver City when he had left two days before. It is true that we had made arrangements to meet on the Sapello River later in the day for a lion hunt with the girls. But in that blizzard I had no doubt that Homer had not left town. I had a momentary, agonizing picture of my hunting companion with a blissful look on his face, sunk deep in the depths of a feather bed. And yet here before us in the snow were the freshest sets of lion tracks that we should ever find. I thought for a moment of trying to track them down on foot and by sight, but that would be foolhardy. There would be little chance of catching the cat and the very present possibility of getting lost in the blizzard. Anyway, I couldn't leave the girls, not even in Copperas Canyon.

I fairly dragged Peter Mule down the widening trail following the tracks. I felt like a hunting dog that is tied up to keep him from following the scent. The tracks of the mother lion and kitten led straight away down the canyon floor in the snow. We were not the only living things that were fleeing the wind-swept ridges above us.

Kay and Eleanor were thoroughly enjoying this lion chase, such

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as it was. At all events, they had not lost out entirely on the hunt they had hoped to find. I did not tell them that we had no chance of catching a lion by following tracks in the snow in that manner. In perhaps a half a mile, and after we had already reached the old mining road, the tracks of the two lions rounded a corner of rock and turned up a little side valley. I dropped the reins of Peter Mule's bridle and followed for a few yards. The visibility seemed to be better. Trees a hundred yards away stood out with black trunks against the snow slope. "Why, it's stopped snowing," Kay said as though that ended all of our troubles. And so it had, almost. Only a few particles of snow drifted down from the still tossing pine trees above us. Even the sky seemed a little lighter although it was still gray with that wintry sodden color. And in the bottom of Copperas Canyon the gloom was little better than a twilight.

A decision was in the making. Either we could follow the tracks of the lioness with a one-in-a-thousand chance of even seeing her, or we could get in touch with Homer as soon as possible and get the hounds. The second alternative certainly seemed the more sensible. I swung the pack mule and the protesting girls down the old mining road at a dog trot.

There was, at the Goforth Place in the Sapello Valley, a telephone. If the blizzard had not disrupted the fragile wire that extended from tree to tree from this cow camp, I might be able to call Homer and give him the news. The Forest Service telephone line of the Goforth Place was not so many miles ahead. It was worth the chance.

There is a lethargy and discouragement that accompanies unsuccessful hunts and an activity and enthusiasm that come when game is in prospect. It is difficult for an outsider to understand these things, if he has never experienced them. The last half of the journey down Copperas Canyon was a gala occasion. The lion tracks had somehow infused us with enthusiasm and a garrulousness that kept pace with our fast progress. If we could only get Homer and especially the lion hounds that he had with him—.

The Forest Service telephone in the little cabin on the Sapello River was one of those affairs that jingles with every lightning stroke anywhere in that section of the mountains and at best has

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a rasping inflection in its receiver that makes every voice sound harsh and distant. Standing on tiptoe always seems to help, even though the old telephone hung low on the rough log wall.

"Homer!" I yelled into the static of the receiver. "Lion tracks! Thousands of them. Fresh in the snow! Do you think you could make it over Pinos Altos?" The only thing I could hear through the singing and popping of the wires was something that sounded like a "Bezzurlife," and the click of the receiver at the Silver City end. Homer would be there if he could make it. Even now I could visualize Mrs. Pickens tearfully trying to dissuade Homer from the foolhardy venture. He hunted lions all the rest of the time, didn't he? Why didn't he stay home and rest for a few days? But lion tracks in a fresh snow were the same thing to Homer as the gleam of gold is to a miner.

Homer didn't arrive until that night, and the frozen snow high on the fenders of his pickup truck was ample evidence of the battle he had made to cross the pine-covered ridges separating us from Silver City. I could see the noses of the eager hounds pressed against the slats of the compartment in the back of the truck. Typically, Homer made no comment on the rugged ride he had had, but simply mentioned as he slipped out of the truck: "Saw a bunch of wild turkeys up on top of the ridge. Ran right into them around a curve. There were about twelve of them, I guess."

That night at the fire as we sat huddled in the melting snow around the blaze, we told Homer of the lion tracks. The first thing a lion-hunter always asks is: "Are you sure they were cat tracks?" We had had many an experience with even seasoned ranchers who mistook dog or occasional wolf tracks for those of the mountain lion. "You bet, we're sure, Homer," the three of us said enthusiastically. Even Kay, who had never seen a track bigger than a house cat's before, was just as emphatic about the authenticity of the trail in the snow. "It was a female and a little kitten," she said with that lilting inflection which only a girl can use when thinking of something soft and furry and cute.

In the gray dawn of the next day, we were up and away. The human disposition is a peculiar thing. It is affected by sights and sounds and irrelevant thoughts especially in the dark half-light of a winter morning. There's something depressing about the

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grayness that goes with a low sky and dark trees and day-old snow. The leather in shoes is stiff and the collar of your jacket feels like an icy ring on the back of your neck. When you are looking at lion tracks or listening to the bark of hounds you don't notice these discomforts. But when you are dragging yourself out of a sleeping bag too early on a winter morning, the question of why you ever came there seems a very logical one indeed.

With the exercise of walking up the old mining road, the blood seemed to pump faster and spirits seemed to rise. There is a little of the child in all of us and I was deriving a juvenile pleasure in being able to show a veteran lion-hunter like Homer the tracks of his trade. I must confess that the imprints from our feet of the day before looked dim and alarmingly melted out. The normally dainty tracks of Peter Mule's small feet were melted to those the size of a horse and were blurred and indistinct. I was especially disconcerted to notice on the south slopes that faced more directly the sickly gray sunlight, the thin layer of hard blizzard snow had melted away entirely. If we had brought Homer across those awful ridges on an abortive cat chase, our stock would hit an all-time low.

As we came to the place where the lioness had trailed down the road and then turned off up a side canyon, I could see even from a distance that her tracks, too, looked melted out and days old. Still, with a little kitten perhaps she couldn't go far. We held our breath as Homer turned the hounds up the hill and pointed out a track or two to encourage them. One or two of the dogs smelled tentatively at a lion imprint and wagged their tails in a weak-hearted fashion. They could catch a little scent, but not much. They raised their heads and circled about aimlessly. The melting of the snow had destroyed so much of the lion smell that the hounds weren't interested. Theirs was a world of scent; they never followed tracks by sight and apparently they couldn't follow these at all.

Homer, I think, was just turning to say something particularly derisive when a hound opened up with a long-drawn bark among the trees above us. It was Buck, that tawny, independent dog with the short tail. The other hounds knew when Buck barked there was a trail to follow. In an instant we were deserted by the casual dogs of a moment ago. There was another bark and then another.

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up on the slope of the ridge. The chase was on. The two girls and I grinned in a knowing way at each other, as though we had had no misgivings whatsoever as to the outcome of this sure-fire chase. We were off up the slope, pulling ourselves up and along by grasping a hold of scrub oak and aspen saplings. This was no place for horses. We would have to do it all on foot.

As we climbed out of the canyon bottom, the snow became more sketchy and the forest floor over which we climbed was a patchwork of brown pine needles and leaves and white snow-clumps in the shadows. We could see the dogs ahead now, smelling the bushes and grass stems. They were trailing the lion by the scent which the cat had left brushing against leaves and twigs. Only experienced veteran hunters like Buck and Chief and Crook had learned to trail this way.

The dogs moved steadily up and angling across the ridge on the north side of Copperas Canyon. Only occasionally could we make out a lion track and that blurred and indistinct in some fragment of snow. It was not a hot trail, but then to our certain knowledge it was at least twenty-four hours old. But Homer possessed one of the finest hound packs in the whole west and with unerring accuracy the dogs traced out the path that the lion had gone. Once in a while, one of the hounds barked well off to the side. That must be the kitten, we thought, that always seemed to range along parallel with his mother but a few yards distant.

We had dropped over the shoulder of a spur ridge and were just descending into a little rincon or basin like so many others that we had already passed. There was a thick growth of aspen in the hollow; probably there was a spring or seep in the side of the hill to produce such a thick grove of the straight-trunked trees. Through the white bark of the aspen we could make out the dark bulk of a low growing spruce—one of those trees that apparently had long ago suffered a stunting scar from a lightning bolt that had caused it to grow all bushy and misshapen.

I could just see one of the dogs on the side of the hollow as he threw up his head and wiggled his keen hound nostrils as though feeling the air in the direction of the gnarled spruce. When a lion hound points in that manner it always means that he has scented a kill or, better yet, a lion. In this case the whole

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hound pack, or as many as we could see among the thick aspens, streaked toward the dark bulk of the stunted spruce as though they had heard the meal-time call. There was a furious snarling and a deafening outburst of barks and hound howls that made the little glade ring with a solid wall of sound. The most exciting part of the thing was that we could see the whole drama taking place, or at least, most of it. The bulk of the overshadowing spruce hid the lioness; it must be she for, when the hound voices rise to that pitch of enthusiasm, the quarry is in sight.

Suddenly there was a movement of sound. The furiously barking dogs and their prey were moving out on the farther side of the hollow. Already we were in a dead run down through the aspen trees across the slippery snow patches. We were as excited as the hounds and leaned forward in our flight down the slope like demented persons, careless of any vestige of safety. This was the thrill of the lion hunt; the intoxication of the noise of the hounds and the excitement of the chase. It would be a dull person indeed, who would hang back under those circumstances.

But the chase had passed up the farther slope of the little hollow more quickly than it takes to tell about it. Even as we reached the old spruce tree, the noise of the dogs was suddenly muted as they crossed the next spur ridge and into the neighboring basin beyond. Beside the dark-growing branches of the shadowy evergreen the snow patches were all trampled and even the pine needles were torn up in clumps and divots as though a struggle had taken place. Apparently the dogs had scented the lioness, cowering in the dark shelter beneath these same branches, but we would come back and examine this lion den later. The cry of the hound pack urged us on.

We struggled breathless up the next spur ridge. Homer and I were well in the lead; we had gallantly left the girls to fend for themselves on the snow slope behind us. From the top of the spur the mixed chorus of the furiously-barking hounds was deafeningly loud and now stationary. We could see the dancing figures of the dogs and their thrashing tails on the very top of the next ridge beyond. They centered on an alligator-barked juniper which leaned crazily from the very top of the ridge. It was one of those trees that had suffered a fire scar, possibly a century ago,

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and was dead on one side. The stark branches of the juniper were outlined well against the winter sky from where we stood.

A ludicrous drama was going on around the old tree. One hound—it looked like Chief at that distance—had run up the slanting trunk in his enthusiasm and now hung precariously on a lower branch. Even as we paused and looked at the dog, he teetered backward from the low-lying limb and fell with a squawking yelp ungracefully on his back. Lion hounds are not well adapted for tree climbing, even though they sometimes attempt it. But against the sky on the top of the ridge we could not make out the bulk of the lioness. A full-grown cougar should have been visible in that almost bare tree. "Must be behind the trunk," Homer muttered as we started to climb once more to get into the center of the excitement.

As we approached the outskirts of the still wildly barking dog pack we could see two or three of the dogs worrying something on the ground. It looked like a bob-cat as a furry paw and a spotted hide flashed among the swiftly-moving dogs. But no! There was a tail, a stubby kitten tail, but a tail nonetheless. It was a baby lion, and the hounds had just killed it. Apparently the juniper tree had not proved a haven secure enough for this luckless little lion. It was a shame as we saw the blood on the little fellow's fur where those sharp hound teeth had torn him in a dozen places. That little fellow would never grow up to walk those ridges as his mother had.

The mother! We had forgotten all about her in pulling the hounds away from the lion kitten. But some of the dogs still bounced around us and stared up into the bare old juniper with hound longing and desire written all over their canine faces. Who can resist looking at an airplane if everybody else is doing so? Our eyes were drawn to the spot in the very top of the juniper tree where the lion hounds were looking so fixedly.

At first even in the almost bare branches we could make out nothing. Certainly there was no bulky mother lion in that sketchy juniper. Then we saw a snarl. There was no other way to describe it. It was a red, rose-petal tongue and a gleaming set of little teeth opened wide in the nastiest snarl I've ever seen. It was only when this fierce thing in the tree above us relaxed the snarl for a moment that we saw the little lion behind that awful

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face. He was a duplicate of the one that lay dead on the ground at our feet.

Then there was another snarl on a branch a little higher than the first! There were two little lions in the old juniper tree. And a nastier dispositioned pair we had never seen. So the old lioness of Copperas Canyon had had three kittens. Where the tracks of these additional two had been in the snow we could not think. Perhaps two of the little rascals had been left in the lion home beneath the spruce tree while mother went foraging with the third. At all events, here were two of the family, safe and being just as nasty as their few weeks of age and their lion heritage showed them how to be. Homer and I heard that long-drawn "O-O-O-o-ooo" which is a woman's way of saying "how cute!" I knew at that moment that the New Mexico State Game Department would never slay these two little lions if the girls had anything to say about it.

I am sure that Homer wanted to kill the kittens then and there and there is no doubt that those terrible-looking hounds did also. Homer only smiled and said: "They look pretty frosty." "Frosty" was the word for it. The two kittens could have weighed no more than five or six pounds apiece and yet they snarled and spit like full-grown carnivores. They clambered around from time to time in the bare limbs of the juniper as though seeking an escape, but there was none. The little fellows seemed clumsy in the tree and teetered precariously as they moved as though this arboreal exercise was a new thing.

Even without the two girls I think we would have decided to catch the little rascals and take them alive. We stationed one of the girls by the tree and sent Kay back to Homer's truck for a burlap bag. Homer and I, with some difficulty, tried to urge the rest of the dogs on the track that the mother lion had made. We were considerably assisted by old Crook, that venerable and supercilious lion trailer, who had deigned to sit and yelp at a couple of little lion kittens. We could hear Crook's long-drawn bark well up the crest of the ridge.

As soon as we had wheedled, brow-beaten and persuaded the rest of the hounds to leave the juniper tree, they caught the enthusiasm of Crook's bark and were away in a body. From the path that the dogs took, it was evident that the old lioness had been

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traveling with the three kittens when the hound pack overtook the family. There was no evidence that the she-lion had put up a fight, or indeed, had even hesitated when the dogs closed in upon them. Among most animals, mother love and the protection of the young is as strong or stronger than self-preservation. Many a mother of the wild will fight to the death for her young ones. But not the lion of Copperas Canyon. Apparently without even a backward glance, except for the pursuing hounds, she sped past the old juniper where her small kittens scrambled for refuge, and was disappearing among the pine trees on the crest of the ridge even as the dogs pulled down the first of her babies and chewed it to ribbons. We had no respect for the female cougar of Copperas.

We caught her in an ordinary fashion in a dead pine tree. She crouched spitting against the bole of the lightning-scarred trunk and even in that elevated position she cowered and shrank from the leaping hounds below. She was a slender lion, beautiful in her way with a coat of rich cinnamon-red and a pure white underbelly. Even at the distance of twenty or thirty feet above us we could make out the black tips of her ears as she moved them around like sound detectors, first toward one barking dog and then another. The muzzle of this mother-cat was salmon colored with beautiful shading around her jaws which she opened frequently in what was supposed to be a terrifying snarl. Here was the killer of deer, the most feared predator of the Mogollon woods, cringing like any wild craven that had completely lost her nerve.

My bullet pierced her neck and slanted upward and lodged in that small brain. Even then she clutched with her hooked claws a large section of pine bark which fell with her to the ground as she came down. She hit all sodden and lifeless on the wet pine needles and only the tip of her beautifully marked tail twitched a little as the dogs closed in on the inert form.

We carried her back whole to the truck between us. She wasn't a big lion. Apparently she was young and in her prime. Perhaps this had been her first litter of kittens; it certainly was her last.

We returned to the sprawling juniper tree where the last of the brood of Copperas Canyon yet held their defiant sanctuary. We had seen lion kittens before. We had caught young lions in all of

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the months from February through the summer. We had treed lions as young as these and others that were half grown. But I don't think that we had ever seen such a pathetically defiant pair as the two little cats that snarled from the juniper limbs. Their stubby little tails, as they balanced midway on a thick branch, looked ludicrous and inadequate. But their small mouths and diminutive teeth were doing grown-up service in fierce growls and hissing spits designed to strike terror to our hearts.

We laughed at the little fellows, but as I climbed the tree I carefully circled around them and held my gloved hand before my face. I had a vivid picture of the changes in my complexion that even the little claws of these baby lions could make. My idea was to throw my jacket over each lion and so involve him in its folds that his clawing and biting machinery would be rendered non-effective. I could then hand him down out of the tree to my companions with safety. It didn't work out that way.

I swung my tattered old jacket over the closer of the two lions who was at that moment calling me all the nasty names that he could think of in best Mogollon lion language. I was surprised at the extent of his vocabulary for one so young. The jacket caught clumsily on a couple of stiff twigs and did not fall over the little lion as I had hoped. As I pressed the cloth around his sides with one hand, he was already wriggling out of the neck end of the coat directly in my face. I twisted away to get out of range of those little raking claws that struck viciously. If his mother had lacked any fighting spirit certainly this little fellow was fast retrieving the family reputation.

As I bent far back to escape this murderous onslaught, a branch over which I had hooked my knee gave way without warning as stiff juniper wood will do. As I clutched wildly for anything that would serve as a handhold I fell sideways past my would-be victim. With all of the quickness of his kind, he fastened both of his forepaws in the flesh of my arm. I could feel the little claws of the cute kitten sinking in with the sharp pain of hot needles. I yowled like a banshee and dropped two or three branches below where I had been clinging with the lion still hanging on and following me down. My friends below yelled encouragement. Those placid Mogollon woods rang with girlish giggles and other undignified sounds. Homer, making no move to help me whatso-

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ever, yelled, "Stay with him, Frank! You've almost got him!" It was of course a considerable question as to who had whom.

As the opposition had drawn first blood, and it was mine, I quickly decided on a bold plan. It is amazing what we will do when girls are watching, even when obviously it is foolhardy. I circled around the old juniper, being careful to keep the trunk between me and the vicious kitten who showed signs of following. Apparently only his lack of sureness in the tree limbs prevented him from finishing me off then and there. His abusive language continued, however.

I carefully sidled out on a big limb above this nasty little animal. My bold plan was to seize the little lion by the scruff of the neck with the same technique that one uses with unruly house cats. It occurred to me also that the mother lioness had probably lifted the kittens in this manner, and so they ought to be used to it. A grip on the back of the neck of this snarling creature ought to render him ineffective enough for capture. My gloved hand swept at the back of the neck of the little cat like a descending eagle. Cleverly I had waited until he had momentarily turned his head as the other kitten behind him made a movement in the tree. I gathered the loose skin beneath my fingers and held tight. What a coup! This was certainly the way to handle cats, belligerent or otherwise.

But again I had underestimated the potentialities of this snarling little bit of spotted fur. At first the kitten clung to the branch with his claws sunk into the wood. Then with a quick change of pace and tactics he twisted clear around in the loose skin by which I held him and sank all four feet with those terrible claws into my much-abused arm. I tried to shake him and to twist his little body this way and that to relieve the pain of his raking claws. But they only sank deeper, or found a new purchase in another tender spot. I shook him savagely, but he only spread his fore-paws with the toes fanned out wide to give the hooked points at their tips a surer hold. If I had not had a heavy shirt and a heavier sweater on at that moment, that baby lion would have stripped my forearm to ribbons. As it was I fairly flung him from me with a wild yell that was half pain, half desperation. Where the little cat landed at that moment I didn't care, but he managed to catch

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a branch and hang on, bottom side up for a moment, and then scramble back to safety.

Homer was handing something up to me. "Better try this, Clyde Beatty," he said in his encouraging way. The thing that he poked up to me on a long stick was the leather thong of a high laced boot. On one end of this long strip of rawhide was a slip noose. That was the system! I would catch the little rascals with some method that allowed leaving free air between myself and those terribly sharp claws. I tied the thong on the end of a strong branch and carefully advanced it until the noose swung in front of the lion kitten's face. With a quick twist I pulled the loop over his head and jerked it tight on his little neck. I had him.

He fought and clawed as before as I pulled him off of the limb, but finally the little body swung clear and I lowered him carefully and quickly down through the branches of the tree to where my companions held the burlap sack open. I dropped the lion, noose, stick and all, into the sack, before our little captive should choke to death. In a moment Homer, with another stick, loosened and fished out the rawhide thong. I was ready for the second of the two terrible lion kittens of Copperas Canyon. In another moment I had slipped the noose over the other little cougar and dropped him like the first into the open mouth of the sack below. The second one fought and scratched as the first, but somehow not quite so belligerently.

The lion language involved seemed a little less vituperative. We found later that the first of these little cats was a male. We called him Hitler, who was at that time particularly unpopular in Europe. The second kitten, the female, I called Lucy in honor of my mother. We hung the burlap bag with its dangerous load, between us on a pole and returned to the truck and camp. That night the two girls returned to Silver City and Homer and I stayed in the Copperas Canyon ridges to catch, if we could, the father of these two youngsters.

The story of the two little kittens of Copperas Canyon does not end here. The death of their mother on that dark wintry ridge was only the beginning of their two lives. In the next few months these two little lions packed more fun, fighting, eating and expense, into their existences than any human beings could ever have accomplished. I mention expense precisely, for this

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proved to be one of the major aspects of the raising of the two lion kittens. Not that meat was hard to get, although it was of course. But only that these two particular little lions had so many ideas.

A few evenings after their memorable capture they had been safely ensconced in a wooden crate to release them from the indignity of the burlap bag. Their tempers had been, for the most part, vented on each other and they fought and clawed one another unmercifully. Bottles with conventional rubber nipples proved disastrous as the lions invariably severed the nipple at one swift bite and drowned themselves in the resulting rush of milk. Hamburger they loved, but woe betide he who offered this tidbit on his finger. The finger was considered part of the meal. Likewise was it impossible to give Hitler and Lucy separate offerings of food. Both of them would rush precipitously at one dish and fight to a finish over that. If it was milk, they spilled it. If it was meat, they scattered it around, wasting more than they ate between growls. After they had battled over what should have been the food for only one, they turned and repeated the process over the second half. The vicious attack and melee seemed to be part of the mealtime process.

Curiously enough, in a very few days the lion kittens seemed to lose almost all fear of humans. The girls seemed to think that it was their constant care that produced this change. I suspect it was a pair of hungry little bellies and the food that was offered. At mealtime the little lions would not wait for the tidbits to be offered to them, but with a rush they would start to climb the arm or leg of their benefactress to get at the food which she held. A human leg apparently was just another juniper tree to them, for they sank their claws in during the ascent with as much vigor and enthusiasm as they displayed on any wild-growing trunk.

This process produced a certain skittishness among the human caretakers of these forward kittens and was the very devil on silk stockings. On one occasion, while foolishly trying to keep the food out of the kitten's reach for a moment, Hitler, in a burst of agility, mounted clear to the top of Eleanor's head and swayed there wildly with his claws sunk well in to keep his balance. Pulling him off was like extracting a mass of fish-hooks from the inside of your pocket.

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One of the most disastrous and expensive escapades of these two redoubtable lions happened in Silver City, not so long after they had left their dead mother in Copperas Canyon. The two girls had acquired the habit of letting the kittens out of the wooden crate which was their new home. "They look so cute, and they need the exercise," the girls said. On that evening they had foolishly left the cats in a tourist cabin while they took in a movie at a theater house not too far away. But on their return they were met at the gate of the tourist camp by the hysterical landlady. "Something terrible has happened! There's water all over the place! There's water coming out beneath the door and there are screams!" Indeed there were screams, although most of these seemed to be coming from the distressed mistress of the tourist cabin. There was water coming out from underneath the door too; lots of it. And there was more water in the cabin where the girls had been staying.

They opened the door cautiously. The room was flooded, but that wasn't the worst of it. There was wet and sodden toilet tissue in dreary strings and loops all over the room. Apparently these wilderness kittens had discovered the joyful secret of how to pull the stuff off the spool and playfully spread it in festoons around the place. In their happy meanderings they had also turned on both faucets in the bathroom. Just how they accomplished this feat we shall never know. These bright and shiny fixtures of the bathroom presumably presented an attractive problem to the two little lions which they solved admirably to their own discomfiture. Above the rising waters, caused by their own misdeeds, sat the two culprits, high on the toilet seat. Their little spotted bodies were bedraggled with wet and wisps of torn toilet paper were plastered here and there. A sorrier pair of cats was never pulled out of a sewer. That night's fun cost \$42.

But the expensive story of the two children of Copperas Canyon was not yet over. Some months later when these redoubtables had far outgrown their wooden crates, there was another and even unhappier tourist camp episode. This was in Raton, New Mexico, and again the girls had left the two lions alone in a tourist cabin. Why a repetition of this folly occurred I have been unable to ascertain. It was obvious by this time to any one, even casually connected with the affair, that raising lion kittens was

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expensive and that they were death on tourist camps. However, human folly being such as it is, Hitler and Lucy had another chance. They took full advantage of the opportunity.

Upon returning to their modest abode after only a short absence, the two girls found the place a shambles. A fur coat had been pulled down and chewed. The mattress of the bed was disemboweled at one end and the cotton stuffing had been scattered in a kittenish manner over the establishment. There were claw marks on all four walls where the lions, cat-like, had reared and raked their talons out of sheer, destructive exuberance. All of the curtains had been pulled to the floor or torn to shreds, or both. They must have leaped on to the hangings, sinking their claws into the fabric and allowing their weight to pull them to the floor in what must have been a most satisfying manner.

But the worst of all was the chandelier. This ornate affair still hung from the center of the ceiling, but with a drunken and dilapidated appearance. It was a circular arrangement, or had been, for most of the wires had been stripped away, and the metal brackets which held them, were broken and dangling. The insulation from the center cord had been stripped clean from the bare copper beneath.

Just how the playful little lions had gotten at the chandelier presented a problem itself. However, the girls worked it out in a manner of which Homer would have approved. On a glass shelf on one wall they found numerous round cat tracks that just fitted the paws of the two innocents that had inhabited the cabin. This glass shelf had been placed there by the all-seeing operators for the holding of tooth brushes and other knick-knacks. It had, however, served as a purchase for lion feet from which they could leap to the dangling chandelier, hang there clawing for a moment, and then drop cat-like to the floor. It must have been great fun and they must have done it some dozens of times, judging from the wrecked and torn appearance of that light fixture. The Raton escapade ran in the nature of fifty-odd dollars, as I recall. All of this was simply put down to the raising of lion kittens. It was expensive, as every one told us.

The real difficulty was not a matter of expense, but a question of life and limb. The limb, in this instance, was Eleanor's neck. She had both the lions on her lap. They were fighting as usual

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over the food which she offered them. Without a split second's warning, Hitler playfully reared and struck her on the side of her face with his padded paw. He did not unsheathe his claws; it was a playful gesture meant only in the course of the afternoon's fun. But Hitler had grown these many months. He had little knowledge of his own power and the bulging muscles of his forearm had almost hardened into adulthood. Hitler on that occasion came very close to dislocating his benefactress's neck.

And so in another crate the two kittens of Copperas Canyon—Hitler and Lucy—were shipped to the Washington Zoo. On the way to the express office, they escaped from the crate, but that is no part of this story. The great national zoo finally did receive this pair and they were viewed by thousands who never knew the story of their cowardly mother, or their interesting childhood. But we who took part in that hunt that began in a blizzard, will never forget the Copperas Canyon lioness and her personable brood.

CHAPTER VIII

OLD MAN SANDIA

I THINK others had seen signs of this remarkable character before ourselves. Perhaps there were one or two who had actually caught a glimpse of his tawny body. The forest ranger said so.

We first found his tracks in a rocky little canyon at the foot of the pinnacle where the mountain climber, McCormick, was killed. Homer and I looked at the print of that round lion foot with considerable interest. The track was a big one, perhaps the largest that we had ever seen. I don't think that the saucer of a demi-tasse coffee cup would have covered the mark of that cat foot.

But it was not only the size of the track that impressed us. The toes of a lion, which never show the claw marks when he is walking, are usually round prints on both sides of the pad. But the toes of this big lion were irregular marks somewhat elongated and club-shaped. The feet of this cougar were broken down like that of a crippled old dog.

"I'll bet he limps when he walks," Homer was saying as he knelt by the little patch of sand in the bottom of the canyon. "The feet of this old boy are broken down like a worn-out wash-rag. He probably has traveled these cliffs for a hundred years."

I involuntarily looked above us as he spoke. Perhaps I half-way expected to see the gray nose of some antiquarian old lion looking down at us from the rugged, granite cliffs above. Perhaps

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even a youngish lion would have broken down feet in that jumble of rocks.

The Sandia Mountains on their western slope show the breaks and fissure canyons of a gigantic fault scarp, formed by the Titans that built this part of the world millions of years ago. A dozen fingerpoints of solid granite stand like guardian sentinels before the faces of these rough cliffs. The canyons that seam these granite heights are straight-walled and precipitous to an extreme, ending in rock-slides and hills of tumbled granite boulders as large as houses. And on this western slope, stratified above like the meringue on a chocolate pie, are ledges and layers of limestone, adding with their horizontal strata an even skyline to the granitic masses below.

And the most interesting part of this melange of geological wonders is that it lies no more than ten miles from the city of Albuquerque. Indeed, in that rocky canyon where Homer and I stood contemplating the track of an aged lion, we could even then hear the faint far-off whine of a locomotive whistle from the Santa Fe tracks in the valley. Then and there we dubbed this lion "Old Man Sandia" from the mountains that were his home, and we determined to catch him before that spring was out.

The peculiar, flattened-out track of the old lion that we had found in the little side canyon below the granite pinnacles was not fresh enough for old Bugger to trail. Bugger, a black and tan hound, was the sparkplug of Homer Pickens' dog pack in those days, and the veteran of ninety odd lion kills. Sue, a velvet-tongued female, was also helping us on the problem of the Old Man of the Sandias. There were other dogs too, of lesser fame and more retiring personality. I don't think any of the dogs or ourselves knew the troubles, the disappointments, the shoe-grinding runs on that rough granite rock which we should have to endure before we knew this venerable lion better.

It was only a week later that we saw the tracks of the broken-down feet of Old Man Sandia again. We picked up a trail in a little patch of late spring snow that had fallen the day before. In the unbroken surface of the thin snow layer the lion's tracks looked enormous, as indeed they were. Some time the night before, this old lion had crossed the mouth of the Pino Canyon and

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had zigzagged up a spur ridge toward those same jagged cliffs and canyons where we had first seen his marks.

Bugger and Sue started up the line of lion prints as though their lives depended on the chase. The track was so fresh that the dogs ran to one side of the actual prints in the snow. The gentle morning breeze, barely stirring the still dead branches of the trees beneath which we passed, wafted the lion smell from those round prints to one side, along the surface of the snow. Scarcely putting their noses to the ground, the dogs could follow the track at a dead run. It was going to be a swift chase and a short one. We'd have the lion with the big feet in less than an hour.

But one hour blended into two. Midmorning came. We continued on through the oak scrub around the base of the gigantic rock pinnacles, until faint and far away the noon whistles of the factories of Albuquerque blew the signal for the city toilers to stop for an hour and get our their lunch boxes. Still those interminable tracks led us on. Thousands of those lion tracks had unwound before us in the snow. Besides these thousands we had left our own foot marks and those of our dogs, sliding, slipping sideways, marring with our black scars the even white of the snow blanket of the virgin Sandia hillsides.

Horses were of no use in that terribly rough country, and we had none. But foot-work under these gruelling circumstances takes a considerable amount of enthusiasm out of the hunter in far less than a complete morning. The thin skim of snow made the footing uncertain and every step was a gamble of a turned ankle or a skinned knee on the rocks beneath. The north slopes of the little side ridges can only be described as treacherous. Here the ground was still frozen and one incautious step often turned into a slide with a nasty fall at the end. Time and again we had to stop to dig snow out of the gun barrel or from the back of our necks. A few quaint expressions of discomfiture are most satisfying under these circumstances. I had picked up several of these epithets from various lion hunters and I found them most satisfactory under trying conditions. But we were on a lion track, and a fresh one, so that a few bruises or the comparatively minor incident of a jagged stick being thrust halfway through the calf of my leg, were considered trivial happenings on the lion hunt.

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The dogs stayed well ahead of us and we walked hard and actually ran where we could, to keep them within hearing at all. "How does that lion with the broken-down feet make so many tracks," I gasped as Homer and I panted on top of the ninth or tenth rocky ridge we had crossed that morning. "If he's old, he certainly doesn't show it much." Homer grinned in reply. "He may not show his age, but we soon will if we keep this up," I retorted somewhat bitterly.

To make matters worse, the mid-April sun was melting the thin fall of snow. There was the steady drip of water from the branches of the trees. Patches of dark rock were showing here and there with wet rims around them where the moisture was running away. The slopes toward the south were already bare in places with pine needles and leaves drying in little clumps.

The tracks of the old lion began to look melted out and larger than ever. We still had not gained on him at all, in spite of our miles of travel. Apparently he had done all this journey the night before, as we had found neither a kill nor any place where he had stopped or laid down.

We had seen one thing, however, and this was a large scrape where the lion had ruffled up a pile of pine needles on a little saddle between two sharp ridges. We could see by the marks in the scrape that those big lion paws had piled up the stuff after the snow had fallen. He had done it last night, all right, and we had been correct too in thinking that he was a male lion.

Where the big cat had stomped down the other side of the ridge Homer showed me a peculiar wavy mark in the snow that appeared intermittently between the lion's tracks. At first I thought that he was dragging his tail which might be a sign of extreme fatigue, but Homer said no. "It's the skin beneath his belly. It hangs down in a big loose fold when they get real old. I've only seen one or two lions like this before and they were big."

I had a mental picture of Old Man Sandia as we paused there in the steep slope with our rifle butts braced in the frozen ground. His nose was gray with age and his ears were cut and torn from a long life of fighting and bloodshed. His body was thin but big-boned and of tremendous size. The lion handled his feet peculiarly with the splayed-out toes, but the powerful muscles in his haunches and shoulders carried him on in spite of this handicap.

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And beneath his belly hung a long trailing fold of dirty white fur which dragged the ground in places as the lion waddled through the snow. This was no ordinary lion, this Old Man Sandia. His capture would mark a memorable point in our hunting experience.

But we didn't catch the old male lion of the Sandia cliffs that day. In the early afternoon the melting warmth of a spring sun erased the snow from all but the shaded canyons and the dark north slopes. With the disappearing layer of white, went the lion tracks and the scent as well. Bugger and Sue, as though agonizing over a crushing failure, worked their best on a disappearing trail. But the harder they worked, the more difficult it became. And about the middle of the afternoon Bugger turned around and looked at us with an enigmatic expression. He wagged his tail weakly and laid down in a patch of sunshine. That trail was finished. Somewhere in the ledges and pinnacles above us an old lion with a gray nose was staring curiously down at some black dots on the mountain slope.

Two weeks later we tried again. We picked up a lion track as it crossed from the south in almost the same place that we had found it before. We followed it for some distance before we saw, in a patch of bare dirt, the familiar broken-down prints of the Old Man. This track was not as fresh as we had hoped, but it would do. At least if this lion had been an ordinary cat the track would serve. But we had already begun to suspect that we were following not only a male lion of tremendous size, but also one whose strength and endurance matched his frame.

Over wet pine needles, through groves of scrub oak that were just beginning to tinge with the first green tips of spring, we followed the lion trail. Past boulders, some of them as large as an Albuquerque office building, under ledges, across ridges and through dark canyons the dogs led us after the old cougar. As the track unwound before us, we knew that we were following a beast that had lived here for years. These tortuous canyons and precipitous cliffs were his home. He appeared to know every rock and cranny in them as he unerringly wound from one height to another. We were the intruders in this wild domain. Even this close to the civilized haunts of man, were pieces of wilderness paradise that a mountain lion could call his own.

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All that day we stumbled and climbed, crawled and scrambled up those awful slopes. The lion had generally zigzagged higher and higher, although at times he took mile-long excursions down some raking ridge or around one of the granite pinnacles that stood in front of the cliffs. By midafternoon we were in the limestone ledges near the top of the mountain. Two hours later the dogs led us through a crack in the mountain rim where the forest deer had long ago worn a little winding trail. Up this deer runway the old lion had climbed and had paused for a moment on the very crest of the mountain. Had he turned here to look back and see if he were pursued? Homer and I thought not. Probably Old Man Sandia didn't even know yet that he had been followed. We hadn't gotten that close to him. But we would, certainly. Soon the lion would make a kill and then we would overrun him and shoot him out of a tree like the rest.

Down the slanting side of the eastward slope of Sandia Mountain, the lion tracks led. Just before evening in the shaded timber we did find a kill. It was an old one, though, a buck deer that had died beneath lion's teeth and claws perhaps two weeks before. There were three places in the leaves beneath the dark trees where the deer had been buried. Each time the lion had returned he had simply grasped a projecting foot or haunch and pulled the carcass out from beneath the covering debris. Then when he had eaten another bellyful of dark venison, he had covered the body carefully again to save it for another meal. The cat instinct of burying their food is strong in mountain lions and Old Man Sandia was no exception.

But the old cougar had not eaten on his kill on this occasion. Indeed the torn ligaments and the scraps of flesh that yet adhered to the bones of the deer had offered little inducement. The antlered skull of the unfortunate animal lay to one side, perhaps torn off completely by coyotes that had scavenged this dead deer, killed by a more able predator. We had noticed before how often lions had passed by old kills even though they apparently had little intention of eating upon them again. The old cougar of Sandia passed by the scattered remains of one of his former victims at several yards distance, apparently with only a passing glance and a single satisfying whiff of the fetid remains of the

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stinking carcass. The track led straight down into the gloom of the heavily-forested slopes of the eastern ridges.

That evening in the twilight we called the disconsolate dogs from the track with some difficulty. The lion hounds were not the only discouraged members of that particular hunting group. A whole mountain stood between us and where we had left the car at the mouth of Pino Canyon. We decided that it was easier to walk on down the east slope of the mountain to the little village of Forest Park where we could reach a Forest Service telephone. A frantic call went out over those wires that night to our respective wives waiting in Albuquerque. They could bring a car completely around the mountains and pick us up. Yes, we replied, we were a little tired. Had we caught the lion? This query was met with only stony silence and the characteristic singing and clacking of the telephone wires as they swayed against some wet tree in the dark woods.

It was a month later that we came close to catching Old Man Sandia. As a matter of fact we had him killed and hung up in a tree a dozen times during those exciting moments. But we had not yet tasted the full repertoire of tricks which the old man possessed.

It was late spring by this time and the snow had gone completely from the lower slopes of the Sandias where the venerable old cat ranged. Apparently he had been on a long trip south, ranging through the Manzano Mountains. About a week before, a tourist had seen the yellow form of a long-tailed cougar jump from the road-bank and cross Highway 66 just at dusk. This might have been the old man coming back from a long circle south. And yet it would seem too foolish for such a clever old cat to allow himself to be seen by a passing tourist. Where had he prowled those past weeks? We thought no human would ever know the cat haunts that Old Man Sandia counted his own. Just how well he knew every rocky gorge and limestone ledge we were very soon to learn.

We picked up his track in that same favorite crossing place. Low down in the mouth of Pino Canyon, the flat-footed old lion had zigzagged down a spur ridge and made a big scrape beneath a pinyon tree. We could see the two marks of his hind paws clearly where he had piled up a collection of duff and dirt as big

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as a bowler hat. In the bare marks made by one of his paws, the imprint of his padded feet showed the same broken-down toes and cracked and furrowed pads which we had followed so many times before.

The track was a good one, certainly made no longer ago than last night. The dogs were off, after a cursory examination and a single whiff of the strong lion scent that the male cougar had left on his scrape. Bugger and Sue started off on the back trail, south across the rolling hills near the mouth of the canyon, following the way the lion had come. It required twenty minutes of sweating labor to persuade Bugger that this was the wrong end of the track. Hard-headedness is a characteristic of lion dogs. If their personalities were not so obdurate they never would stay on a cat trail until their noses were rubbed bloody-raw and their flanks were painted red from the blood whipping from the ends of their tails. This takes tenacity and Bugger had every bit as much as any lion hound I ever saw. We had to reach him, which was not easy on a hot trail, and physically turn him around. "Here he goes. Here Bugger, this way, you dad-blamed blankety-blank hard-headed black thing!"

Bugger finally decided, obviously reluctantly, that we were right. We finally started in the right direction. It was early morning. The chill crispness of the frost had not yet left the grass stems. The days of the Old Man of the Sandias were numbered. There would be a mighty big lion skin stretched out by tonight.

The dogs followed the trail with no difficulty. We had no horses and we were hard put to it to keep within sound of the dogs' voices. The old lion had traced around the bases of some of the tremendous granite boulders on the side of the canyon and had started up the opposite ridge. He zigzagged among the oak scrub and the loose rocks on the slope as though he were seeking an easy ascent. Perhaps he was tired. That would make the matter simple.

Two hours later, however, we were still following that same zigzagged course. But it was ourselves that were tired. The sun was already hot on the granite cliffs around us. We had climbed perhaps two thousand feet of steady, gruelling slope. We were panting and perspiring freely, although long crystals of frost yet clung to the rough rock in the shade. The dogs were ahead, al-

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ways ahead on that interminable track. Their still-eager barking now was echoing among the granite pinnacles of the mountain-side. The echoes were confusing. We had often noted before in narrow canyons or along cliff faces that the origins of sounds were deceiving.

But whatever the direction, there was no doubt that the dogs were above us. We had to climb yet another slope. Up and up we went, scaling the very face of the most precipitous side of the Sandia range. Some of the granite pinnacles raised pointed fingers and fin-like bulks hundreds of feet above us. We clung gratefully in their shade as we climbed and cursed the clinging oak brush that grew on the slopes. This cagy cougar was leading us over the steepest and roughest country he could find. But we'd catch him yet.

It was almost noon and still the trail wound on. We had climbed on to the very face of the Sandia cliffs. Here the limestone ledges lie horizontally over the granite rocks below. We paused a moment on one of these limestone terraces and looked back at the awful slopes that we had somehow surmounted.

We could look straight down on these same granite pinnacles that a short time ago had towered above us. What a fairyland of rocks, all covered with splotches of lichens like spatters of paint from giants' brushes. Far in the distance Albuquerque sprawled in the valley and on the mesa in the form of a T. The great office buildings and the wondrous edifices reared there by the hand of man, were dwarfed into puny insignificance. There was not a one so tall, so awe-inspiring or so magnificent as any of the giant pinnacles that clung to the side of Sandia Mountain.

I had just taken a sodden sandwich out of my pocket. We did not dare to stop or the dogs might run off and leave us. But the heat of the day seemed to be affecting them too, for they were running slower and their barks were fewer. I had taken the first bite of the jelly-soaked bread when there was a sudden rush and roar of sound. It was the hounds. They had hit upon something. One of the younger dogs squeaked like the giggle of a hysterical girl. Bugger and Sue and Judge roared together as though with one bellowing voice. "They've jumped him," Homer yelled. "Come on!" I flung the awful sandwich over the edge of the

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ledge into the scenery below. When a pack of lion hounds jump the quarry, there's no place for hunger.

Seconds before, our feet had felt like lead. Now Homer and I sprinted along that rocky ledge as though we were just starting out on the hunt. The dogs, too, seemed to have reserves of energy which not even they suspected. The noise of the chase was above and beyond us, on another one of the rock ledges that ran along the face of the Sandia cliffs. Here and there tufts of oak brush and mountain mahogany grew in thickets on the ledges to block the way. We clawed our way through these with a disregard for clothes and casual scratches like men demented. Homer was ahead and the few glimpses I had of his back told more eloquently than any expression of his face could have done, that lion was ours.

We scrambled up a short talus slope that led to the ledge above. Here we could see the puffs of fresh dirt and scattered stones that showed where the dogs had passed. This band of limestone was almost as smooth as a street, and half as wide. We broke into a dead run, gasping and panting as we went, and carrying our rifles on the outside to keep them from banging against the rock projections of the cliff. We rounded a shoulder of the cliff face and the noise of the dogs was deafeningly near. There is a vibrant ring in a hound's bark when he is looking at a lion. Those dogs, Bugger and Sue and the rest, saw the Old Man of the Sandias. They were at that moment looking at that scarred old hide and the gray-nosed face and the green eyes. But not for long.

The noise of the hounds stopped all at once as though the dogs had been dropped into a pocket and the top closed. There was a whining yelp or two, then silence. The noon-day stillness of the mountain was absolute. Far down on the slope below us we could hear the faint scrambling and the rolling of rocks as a deer skittered off through the brush. A fox among the granite pinnacles below, yapped twice his annoyance at the din and confusion of the lion chase above. That was all.

It suddenly seemed as though we were the only living things among those limestone cliffs. We slowed to a walk, wonderment and a feeling of frustration suddenly taking the place of the elation of a moment ago. Past Homer's drooping form I could see one of the hounds ahead. The dog sat and looked up at the cliff

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face. There was Bugger too, and Sue and Judge, all sitting on the rock ledge with their heads in the air. As we came to them, they whined a little and looked up, but did not bark.

Then we saw what lay beyond them. The broad ledge which we had been so easily following, abruptly ended. Beyond the dogs a hedgehog cactus hung precariously in a crack in the rock. That was all. Centuries ago a whole segment of the cliff had fallen away to crash unheard among the slopes and depths of the lower canyons. This rock fall had carried with it the ledge and a considerable part of the cliff as well. There was no way on here. The awfulness of the chasm that opened at the end of the ledge sent cold shivers up and dwon our backs like the tremors in the middle of a fever.

But the dogs looked up. There the rock wall was sheer and actually slightly overhanging. There was no knob or projection or crevice in which any but a lizard could have found purchase. And the rock edge of the next limestone ledge above us was a good twenty feet. It was not until Bugger, that sagacious old hound, had leapt two or three times up that impossible rock wall and fallen back that we got the idea. Then we found the track of the big male lion, just a place where one of those round hind feet had flattened in a film of dirt caught in a hollow of the rock. The other lion imprints had been blotted out as the hounds milled at the end of the ledge.

The awful truth was as plain as the track itself. The Old Man of the Sandias had leaped straight up to the ledge above. He had backed almost to the edge of the lower rock and apparently with the dogs almost upon him. Then those flattened-out lion feet had bunched beneath him and uncoiled in a mighty spring. It was a leap for life and it won. We thought we could see scratches on the limestone face above where those same hind feet had scrambled for a moment with raking claws to find a purchase and make him secure. The Old Man of the Sandias had gone. The dogs looked disconcerted and we felt very tired, more tired than we had been on many a longer hunt before.

It took us almost two hours to retrace our steps along that ledge to a narrow cleft where we might climb above. Even here we had to hoist the hounds up, one after another, to the next level. By the time we had again crossed over the cliff face to find the spot

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where the old lion had resumed his flight, we had lost two precious hours. This was enough. It was late afternoon as we topped out over the very crest of the mountain still following the familiar track of the broken-down feet. It was almost dark as we, cold and exhausted, lost the track on the other side of the mountain. We had discussed a dozen times whether the lion had deliberately led us to that cul-de-sac on the limestone cliffs. It was a clever ruse or an act of desperation. As we continued to match our skill and wits with the Old Man of the Sandias, the certainty gradually grew upon us that this escape on the limestone ledges was no accident.

In the weeks that followed we talked often of the smart old lion that walked the Sandia rim. Homer was busy with many things of Game Department import and I went on some lion hunts by myself. Twice again during these sporadic junkets into those rugged canyons I followed the splayed-out tracks of this phantom cougar. I grew to think of him that way, as a lion without body who made tracks in mud and snow, but who had no real essence that a bullet could bite into.

Through the long summer months I checked occasionally in Pino Canyon and on the ridges of Bear Canyon where we had followed the Old Man so often. Every time the family had a picnic, or the University had an outing, I would somehow persuade them to go that way. During these occasions I scoured the canyon bottoms and the ridges for the tell-tale signs of our Nemesis, the old lion of the Sandias. Several times during the hot summer months I found his scrape. Twice I found deer that he had killed—bloody and dried masses of what had once been clean-limbed animals. He apparently killed them with a single bone-splintering blow of his paw.

Never once did I find a track that was good or the sure sign that I was close to the Old Man. There were only enough indications that a big male lion had passed that way to let me know for sure that this wrinkled old cougar still lived in those Sandia canyons.

That fall Homer and I took up our lion hunting seriously. We hauled baled hay up into the canyon mouths so that we could keep horses on the spot. During these hunts we went part way on horseback and then finished the gruelling trips on foot. Even the

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two or three miles that the horses could go, helped a little. We circled in these canyons on weekend hunts when we could ill spare the time from our more legitimate business. We questioned the Forest Rangers on all sides of the mountain to see if any had seen fresh lion sign that might be a certain old cougar with a long fold of skin beneath his belly.

During October and November and into December we went to see if by some chance we would cut those canyons at exactly the right time. The hunt of this old lion had become a passion. It was something we had left undone that we must finish before going to other tasks. It was a challenge and a mystery. With the veteran dogs at our command, even the feline wraith of the Sandias could not eternally elude us.

The winter months blended into spring—the second spring that our dogs and ourselves had followed a certain old lion. Again Homer Pickens was busy with affairs of the State and Bugger and I were left to carry on the hunt alone.

On one of these occasions—of which I have actually lost count—I was accompanied by a student from the University, a certain Walter Taylor who had evidenced an interest in lion hunting and especially in one particularly elusive male cat that dwelt in the cliffs where one could hear the noon whistles of Albuquerque.

This particular hunt started out like so many of the others had done. We parked our steaming car by the ruins of the old Spanish hacienda at the mouth of Pino Canyon. It was early March and the snow crunched underfoot as we trudged up the steady grade on the floor of the wash. Bugger had several minutes before bounded ahead with the spirited enthusiasm that only the start of the hunt and a brisk spring morning can bring forth.

I had just finished telling Walter that this would probably be a “dry run” like the rest when there was a noise ahead. At first it sounded like a wolf as it echoed over the small hills at the mouth of the canyon. It was Bugger. He had found a track and must be barking his first cry in some little gully on the other side of a hill, for his voice was muffled. Walter and I broke into a dead run. This lion hunt was starting off with a rush.

Some three or four hundred yards ahead we saw Bugger already going up a small point, barking constantly and only occasionally thrusting his nose into the snow. We slid down one more small

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canyon mouth and climbed a knoll to where we could see the dark tracks of the dog in the snow. We came upon the exact spot where Bugger had struck a trail. There were the round tracks of a lion, burning fresh. The sharp crisp outline of those imprints looked very like the tracks of the dog beside them. The lion must have passed that way only a short time before, in the very early morning, we thought. Even then as we paused for a moment beside the tracks, the sun had not yet crested the tip of the mountain.

But wait! These lion tracks were of fair size, but certainly not as big as those of Old Man Sandia. The toes, too, were neat and firm and not the flattened-out appendages that we had followed on so many disastrous occasions before. This was a grown lion, but not our old friend. I shrugged my shoulders almost in disappointment, but my companion didn't feel that way at all. A lion is a lion and in an early, crisp morning with a fresh dog ahead of you, what else would you desire?

We tucked our rifles beneath our arms and started off on another chase up those awful slopes. As Homer had once remarked on one of these lamentable occasions, we had been through those ridges and canyons so many times that we had a pet name for every rock that we saw. Walter and I had just topped the first ridge and were taking in great gulps of the cold mountain air. We could feel the chill inside of our lungs and a sense of well being and health pervaded us.

"Cripes!" Walter exclaimed, pointing his gun barrel to one side. "Look at the lion tracks." He was right. Another set of lion tracks had come out of the young pine trees on the side of the ridge and merged with those we had been following. So two lions were walking the Sandia ridges that frosty morning. This was going to be exciting.

Bugger was on ahead, some place, barking his head off. As we struggled to catch up, the sound seemed to remain almost stationary. But he wasn't barking "Treed!" As a matter of fact, his staccato yelps had a worried ring to them. We soon found out why.

These many months past we had been looking for lion tracks—fresh lion tracks. Now Bugger and Walter and I had too many of the very thing that we had sought so eagerly. There was a

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small glade in the oak brush and pine trees on the crest of the ridge. Here a forest fire of long ago had burned out a patch of two acres or so which yet remained clear, with the fallen logs of some of the great trees that had grown there yet lying rotting on the ground. In this clear place the faithful Bugger was circling and barking like a dog having a fit. Over and across the fallen logs, covered with mounds of snow, he circled and jumped.

This little open glade was a maze of lion tracks. There seemed no square foot of snowy surface that didn't have one of those big round prints. There were lion tracks up one log and down another. They circled the glade and cut across it and nowhere did they seem to lead out of the maze.

I sent Walter around one side of the glade and myself took the other, circling wide. In that fresh snow we ought to see where the lions had departed as easily as Bugger could smell them. But we found no track. In the open place among the trees, the two lions had apparently played fox and geese and then vanished into thin air. They had not doubled back, they had not continued up the ridge. This was as bad as the tricks that the Old Man of the Sandias had played upon us.

Suddenly there was a bark down the side of the ridge. Bugger had found the tracks. They must have leapt clear of the little glade somewhere and bounded down the slope. I yelled to Walter and we were off at right angles to our previous course down the side of the ridge. Soon we could see the tracks of a lion. The beast was running and only hit the snow every twenty feet or so —gigantic strides.

Bugger was barking in the very bottom of the canyon now. As we dropped down close to him, we could see that the canyon floor was grown thick with a heavy clump of dark spruce trees. Their great boles, nourished by the trickling moisture at their feet, had grown massive and close together. The dark limbs of these evergreens intertwined in the narrow canyon to form a dark, overpowering shade in which no other plant could grow.

In the twilight beneath the lower dead branches we could just make out the black and tan form of Bugger, circling beneath the trees. He had stopped barking now and seemed to be fairly unconcerned about the pressing nature of the lion chase. Walter and I slid down the last slope and bent low to join the dog in the

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thicket of spruces. Here the thin snow had filtered only in a light powder over the dead, bare cover of the forest floor. But in this white film there were lion tracks as before—hundreds of them. They led in every direction at once, and nowhere altogether. Lions had circled the trunks of each one of these trees and in one place it was plain, a great cat had reared against the rough spruce bark and raked great chunks of the wood off with his talons. Cats are much the same.

Instead of circling frantically, Bugger was this time sitting down. He scratched an itching place under his collar with all the ease of manner that he might have assumed on the front porch at home. Walter said rather witheringly “some dog!” and turned away in disgust. Frankly I had never seen a lion hound, especially such a champion as this, lie down in the middle of a chase. Walter and I were standing under one of the largest of the spruces as we discussed ways and means. “We’ve got to get this track out of here,” I blustered in my most hearty manner. “You go down to the end of this tree clump and check the snow down the canyon. I’ll go up.”

As Walter shouldered his gun and ducked beneath the low-hanging branches I restrained an enigmatic impulse to kick Bugger who was now lounging at my feet. Some dog, to let us down that way, with fresh lion tracks all around us. I too picked up my carbine and turned to go. As I did so the barrel caught on one of the dry underbranches of the old tree. It popped off in two pieces with a report like a pistol.

Before I could realize what had happened, I heard a crash and snap of other branches and the tree above me sprang into life. There was a roar of noise like a thousand ruffled grouse getting out of the brush all at once. A long, tawny form crashed through the branches of the thick spruce tree and sailed with a flash of a trailing tail, almost over my head. It was a lion, and a big one! He had been in the tree beneath which we had talked, all that time. In two bounds he would be out of sight, up the opposite side of the canyon which lay so near. One bound—part of another—the years of shotgun training paid off in the impulse of the moment.

The rifle was at my shoulder and trained ahead of the sailing lion like the reflex of an automaton. The lead, the distance, the

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speed of the beast—were all gauged by that same instinct which swings the shotgun barrel ahead and above a rising pheasant. There was no time to bring the Rocky Mountain sights into fine purchase. The noise of the single shot blasted the stillness of that canyon, before the broken sticks which the lion had dislodged began to trickle down out of the tree. The long-limbed cat crumpled at the end of the second bound, paused a fleeting instant with forepaws cupped into the snow at the base of the slope, then slid slowly, lifeless back almost to my feet, leaving a long streak of crimson on the virgin white of the snow.

Bugger was the only one who did not seem surprised. Walter Taylor was as hearty in his congratulations of the hound dog as he was of my lucky shot. After the usual protestations in the interests of modesty, we stooped to examine the beautiful lion that lay on the snow. The shot had hit the cougar from the side, slanting upwards between the shoulders. It was a magnificent lion, in the prime of life, and a female. We could tell that she had recently suckled some kittens, although her milk was dried up at that particular time.

So this was the beautiful young girl-lion which the Old Man of Sandia called his mate. This was the female for which he had made those many lion scrapes that we had seen so often. This beautiful lioness that lay stiffening on the snow was the object of his many excursions and long prowlings in those cliffs. We had, by some lucky or unlucky chance, caught the mate of Old Man Sandia. As we contemplated this thought, somehow it seemed like a dastardly and cowardly trick. We had taken advantage of her and shot her down as she sought to escape perhaps to regain the side of the old lion on the cliffs. It must be the darkness beneath those awful spruce trees that produced an atmosphere of foreboding that we felt.

Walter and I hurriedly shouldered the dead lion and set off down the canyon back to the car. We would gleefully report to Homer Pickens the great news of the death of the wife of Old Man Sandia, and the additional information that there had been two lion tracks. Perhaps this female might be the break in our luck by which we could lure the Old Man into our clutches. It had been done before with men as well as beasts.

We drove proudly through town with the female lion on the

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fender of the pickup truck. We pretended not to notice as crowds at the street crossings stopped and stared as we passed. A dead lion is a novelty even to the people of Albuquerque.

"So you got one," Homer said dryly as we drove up with a flourish before his house. His keen eye had told at a glance that the clean-limbed cougar draped on our car was not the Old Man of the Sandias. "But there were the tracks of two lions," I blurted out, as though to retrieve a disappointing situation. It was not for some moments that I volunteered the information that the other lion track had not shown the broken-down toes of the Old Man either. But as Walter and I had assured each other, a lion was a lion. Homer said that his business had never been more pressing, and his wife would have a fit, but he was with us for the next day anyway.

The cold stars and the wisp of a moon were still visible as we bumped our truck up over the rough road at the mouth of Pino Canyon. Our headlights danced up and down in the shadows. Those same lights must have been clearly visible to green eyes watching from the cliffs. There was a skim of ice on the little pond by the Spanish ruin as the dogs went down for a drink. For this second effort, the female Sue had joined the posse, and another dog, Judge, that we had used a time or two before. Perhaps, before those same heavens were streaked with the red of sunset, the Old Man of the Sandias would have met his match. He must be there now, close in those granite cliffs that bulked so dark in the shadow of the mountain.

Walter and I eagerly set the pace ahead to show Homer where a fresh lion track might be found. The keenness of the air and the certainty of coming excitement counteracted any of the usual fatigue of pulling up those first steep slopes. We had not necked the dogs together or kept them on a leash and they bounced eagerly before us with their tails held high in the air. A herd of seven or eight deer started with a rush out of a brushy gully and turned for a moment to stare on the farther slope. Even the youngest of the dogs did not waste a passing glance at the hot smell of venison that came so close. We were after lions that day and perhaps one particular lion.

With all of the predictability of the striking of a clock, we heard the long-drawn bark of Bugger as he struck the trail. In-

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deed the track wasn't a hundred yards from the spot where we had picked up the scent of the Sandia female the day before. There was another bark and another. We rushed forward eagerly to scan the track and see what we had. Homer was there first as usual. He looked almost disappointed as he turned from examining the ground. "It's a big lion all right, but not the one you think." He shrugged his shoulders enigmatically and we started off almost as though we had suffered an initial setback.

The track was clear on the now-frozen crust of the day before. In places only the muddy print of lion feet showed on the white snow. In spots the weight of the animal had broken through in little pits of snow fragments. It was a good-sized lion and the track was satisfactorily fresh. It seemed as though this cat had circled that way after we had left the afternoon before. Perhaps he was looking for his mother that we had killed in the spruce thicket. That must be it. This was a grown kitten that still was hunting with his mother. This was one of the children of the Old Man. Perhaps, just perhaps, we might get close to the old veteran himself that way.

As inevitably as on the previous occasions, the lion took us upward. We circled and climbed and scrambled and pulled to raise ourselves on those steep slopes. "These are the climbingest lions that I ever saw," panted Walter as though he too were an old timer of the chase, as indeed he was after this experience. The trail led along a spur ridge on the very lip of the canyon where we had killed the female. I thought I could see down there on the slope, a streak of red on the snow, now turned dark in the hours since a beautiful lion had laid there.

As we followed this new lion track, the certainty grew upon us that it was a young and vigorous male lion. He certainly was vigorous and left us in no doubt on that score. At the very base of the precipitous, granitic cliffs on the face of the mountain, he turned north and threaded his way paralleling along the slopes toward Juan Tabo Canyon.

By this time we were well behind the dogs. In the uncertain footing of the steep talus slopes at the foot of the cliffs, we lost further ground. But the morning was still and we could hear the booming of the dogs ahead and beyond us as the noise echoed among the granite pinnacles. These chases of the Sandias seemed

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always to lead us among the mighty fingers of rock that thrust from the mountains on this side. Their magnificence always made up for any disappointments that we might suffer. But this was not a morning for disappointment.

I happened to pause for a moment, perhaps to look back at one of these same rock spires with its colorful splotches of lichens. I saw from the corner of my eye the flicker of movement on top of the rock. It was a dark something, darker than the shadowy granite and it waved sinuously, although there was no breeze.

"Look! Look! Look!" I gasped to my companions without turning around. I was still gaping awkwardly as I pointed. That something was a long tail and it was attached to a real live lion who lay like a gigantic pussy cat on the very crest of the rocks above us. I could make out his ears against the morning sky and the tawny gray of his back as he stretched full length on the rocks. Only his tail moved up and down with that movement that had betrayed him. He arched a burly neck and looked down quizzically at us on the slope below. I thought I could see his feline face break into a snarl, but I wasn't sure at that distance. He turned his head quickly as though some new sound had arrested his attention.

The dogs! They were barking around a shoulder of the mountain on the slope. Apparently the lion had made a great loop and had doubled on his own trail to lie down at this lookout place to view those who might follow.

Homer and Walter came back to my side and we talked in whispers of the great lion stretched on the rocks above. The distance was not great, perhaps a hundred yards, not quite straight up. Should we wait for the dogs? No, they might jump him and the chase might extend over two or three of those awful canyons. Walter had never shot a lion before. He'd like to try. But he had better not miss, Homer and I reminded him grimly.

Walter borrowed Homer's short-barreled carbine. He steadied himself on the steep slope with his back against a mass of scrub oak. "Draw a fine bead," Homer hissed in his ear. "Don't hit the rock," I admonished from the other side. In spite of these handicaps, the barrel of the gun was as steady as any other part of the scenery as I could see it out of the corner of my eye.

Our attention was riveted on the lion as he lay quiet and un-

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concerned on top of the rock. Even tensed as we were, the blast of the gun was nerve-shattering and I flinched even as I saw the lion start and tense as the bullet struck him. He shivered as though a chill passed over his frame and his head doubled under him, even as his mighty hind quarters uncoiled in a leap of death. Out and over the edge of the rock pinnacle this spasm carried him. Then end over end with his long tail flying, the big cat of the mountains hurtled toward us from that awful height. The limp form fell with a crash and a spurt of dead leaves in the oak thicket, then slid a little and lay still. It was over!

But no! Even while we yet stared, fascinated, at the rugged peak of that rocky height where the lion had lain so unconcernedly a second before, there was another movement. Before the sound of the rifle shot had echoed back to us from the other rocks around, there was a heaving among the rough, rocky shapes above. A smooth long form came into prominence and darted away up the slope, with the flick of a sinewy tail. It was another lion, as big and gray as the first. We had not even seen this second one before, or suspected his presence in the drama of the granite pinnacle. As we stared open-mouthed and uncomprehending, he disappeared over the edge of the pinnacle beyond, with one sailing graceful bound.

"Two!" someone said behind me with the startled intonation of a person who had just seen an auto accident. So the family of the Old Man of the Sandias numbered two, and we had just killed one. That was right, we had almost forgotten the gray lion that Walter had so neatly brought down from the jagged pinnacle.

We stepped forward a few yards to where the cat lay, half-bunched beneath a small oak and with his head down hill. He wasn't quite dead and the *coup de grâce* of another shot seemed necessary. He was a big lion, a male, fully grown, but obviously young. The son of the Old Man undoubtedly reflected the strength and power of his aged father. But this young lion would never grow old. Indeed, he had had little chance to learn the ways of an adult lion or to prowl the wild domain of his parents.

We slapped Walter on the back in the way that humans do when one of them has particularly distinguished himself. We rolled back the lips of the dead lion to look at his keen, white

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teeth, unblunted by much use. His fur was still a winter gray—a beautiful skin. We hefted him tentatively and decided that his one hundred and thirty or forty-odd pounds would be too heavy going for our tired backs over that rough country. We would have to skin him and leave the carcass here.

But the other lion—there was need for speed. In a second the thought galvanized us into action. “Walter! You have a knife?” Homer said curtly. “Then you skin him. Leave the head and paws on. Frank! Let’s go! Bugger! Sue! Judge!” Homer bawled at the top of his lungs, with a note of urgency. “Here boys! Here! This way, here he goes!” As Homer yelled, we were pulling our way up the steep slope to one side of the granite pinnacle. We wanted to put the dogs on the track of the second lion before the beast got too much of a start.

It seemed hours before we pulled ourselves level with the rock where the two lions had lain. There was a fin of granite which connected this pinnacle with the steep slope behind. On this narrow footing, the second lion must have gone in his flight.

There was a panting sound and the tinkle of a metal collar behind us. Bugger was there with his tongue hanging out the corner of his mouth and his hound face opened into a broad smile. Bugger may not have heard our shouts, but he had heard the shot and a rifle shot could mean only one thing.

“Where is that lion?” Bugger said with every movement and action. Homer made a sweeping motion brushing his outstretched fingers close to the surface of the rock where we stood. Bugger pressed his wet nose excitedly in two or three spots then focused quickly at one place as though actually eating something on the surface of the stone. His tail whipped wildly in an ecstasy of exhilaration. Then he raised his head reluctantly and gave a long-drawn bark. We were off! The two other dogs passed us before we had gotten fairly started. When Bugger barked that way, it was a lion trail and a fresh one.

The dogs angled off along the almost vertical slope, slanting slightly downward. Apparently the fleeing lion had not been so disconcerted that he did not arrange to keep the bulk of the granite pinnacle between ourselves and his flight. Before we had made half of the descent, the dogs had circled another granite mass and dropped into the depths of a canyon beyond. They

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were going at a dead run and barking as they ran. On a lion track only ten minutes old, a good hound scarcely has to put his nose to the ground, and these were good animals.

Before Homer and I could reach the edge of the canyon, the dogs had surmounted the farther slope of the awful place and were just topping out on the ridge beyond. With a final echoing bark and a flourish of their tails, we saw them disappear over the crest.

This canyon work is the terrible part of the lion chase. But there was no use pausing to contemplate how bad it would be. We plunged down the slope, hoping to find a deer trail or a ledge which would help us in crossing the chasm. We plunged down, sliding and slipping, breaking our fall by grasping branches and the boles of scattered aspens. At the bottom of the canyon there was a ledge. We splashed through the trickle of water that ran over it and the green moss that grew in the moisture. The ice along the edge crackled beneath our feet. The farther slope was almost straight up and down, but we attacked it viciously. This was no time for picking easy routes. Another canyon and the dogs might outrun us entirely.

There were yuccas and cactus and mountain mahogany bushes growing in clefts and dirt pockets on that canyon wall. Pulling and bracing ourselves and thrusting with our rifle butts we made it to the top. Many a bloody and skinned place on hand and knees went all unnoticed.

Gasping for breath in the thin air we stood on the very crest of the ridge where the dogs had disappeared a short while before. Between the pumping of our hearts and the rasp of our breathing we could hear the dogs again. They were still running free. They were on the far side of the next canyon. We could catch a glimpse of movement on the far slope, just on the peak of the ridge beyond. They crossed over and were gone again. We had another awful canyon to cross. Homer and I looked at each other and grinned weakly. We started down the slope with the muscles still twitching in our legs.

How we crossed that next canyon, I do not fully remember, but we did. There are depths of human endurance which we summon up on these occasions, or when a runner in a track meet needs an extra spurt in front of the grandstand to cross the tape.

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As Homer and I sagged against the rough bark of a big pine tree on that next ridge, we could again hear the roar of the hounds in the bottom of the canyon below. They were barking "Treed!" The chase was done.

We slid down into the canyon bottom at a slower pace. There was less need for hurry now. Even before we arrived at the end of the trail we could see the dogs circling excitedly around a single Douglas fir that grew by itself in the canyon floor. We came among the bouncing hounds and encouraged them with our words and voices, then looked, as they did, into the welter of branches of the thick tree.

At first we could make out only a patch of white among the dark, woody stems. Then as we wiped the sweat from our eyes, we could see the lion, standing upright on all four feet on top of a big limb. The lion too was panting heavily from the exertion of his run and he kept looking off into the distance of the mountains as though eager to forget the awful things that he saw at the foot of his tree refuge.

Homer nodded to me and I unholstered a heavy revolver that I had worn all through this hunt. Shooting a lion out of a tree requires no particular skill and this .38 six-shooter would do the job very well. I waited for a few minutes so that the blood pumping in my wrists would not make the gun any less steady than it usually was. I sat down, braced my elbows on both knees and pointed the heavy revolver upward between both hands. I drew the sights fine on the neck of the lion to one side of the big limb. There was a welter of branches and twigs between. The big frame of the .38 recoiled between my hands as I squeezed off the shot.

There were seconds of echoing silence as the lion paused for a moment as though untouched. Then his cat frame, like that of his brother, shuddered and sank low on the fir limb. He rolled sideways and with his feet in the air, back foremost, he crashed through the branches to the ground.

But that was not all. With the revolver still in my hand, I stepped forward to where the crumpled lion lay, apparently dead. There was a snarl and a gasping sound and the cat uncoiled and leaped to his feet. I had a glimpse of a spot of red on his throat and a wisp of bloody foam as he looked straight into my face with

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a malice and hate that no human could ever achieve. Then he was gone.

The dogs seemed as startled as ourselves and were yards behind the lion as he took off running in great, sweeping bounds as cats do. But the end was near and inevitable. Two hundred yards down the canyon we could hear the hounds barking "Treed!" again, with that furious insistence that meant that their noses were only inches away from the form of a cat. I ran forward to finish the job that I had so poorly started. I like to think that a tree limb had deflected the bullet, for certainly it had not hit true. This lion was far from dead.

The gray form of the cougar was now stretched in a small pinyon tree, leaning crazily from the slope of the canyon at one side. It wasn't a good refuge, but the only one he could find on that short notice. Without waiting for Homer to catch up with me, I leveled the gun again and shot into the side of the lion just behind the shoulder. I could see a wisp of fur carried away by the lead bullet. Then the lion jumped out of the tree and landed on all four feet, still with the life not yet gone. The poor beast ran several steps down the floor of the canyon, then turned at bay as the dogs closed in around him.

With his back to a rock and his snarling teeth and raking talons presented to the enemy, another child of the Old Man of the Sandias met his end. He died gamely, bravely, on his feet and facing danger. I administered the *coup de grâce* from behind. I leaned from the rock above the lion and with the barrel of the six-shooter almost touching his furry back, emptied the contents of the cylinder between those powerful shoulders. It was done and the dogs chewed contentedly on the limp form.

This lion, as his litter mate, was a male, gray with his winter coat still thick on his hide and his sharp canine teeth as yet undulled by use. Two sons of the Old Man had fallen before our guns that day, but never once had we come close to the old gentleman himself.

We heard a noise above us on the slope. A dislodged rock rolled down and stopped against the bole of a tree. Walter Taylor appeared over the rim of the slope with the gray form of a loose skin draped across his shoulders. "You got the other one, I see,"

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he said with a joyful ring to his voice. Homer and I did not answer, but continued skinning the lion.

For several weeks, the death of the three lions seemed to satisfy us. But there was a gnawing insistence, too, that the business on the Sandia ridges was still unfinished. Weeks passed into months. Walter Taylor graduated and had had the gray skin of the lion which he had killed made into a hearth rug so that he could tell his children the story in years to come. Through the summer I made several sporadic forays into the familiar canyons near town. It was not until early fall that we settled down in earnest to end this business of the phantom lion of the Sandia Mountains. Two years is a long time to let one lion elude a professional hunter. On the street corners and at the club, acquaintances constantly asked us the question: "Have you caught him yet?" and the answer was always the same.

It was late September when an employee of the Forest Service, who was engaged in scraping the road that led up the far side of the mountain, called us. "Saw a lion track. A big one in the dirt at the edge of the road. I think it's the one you've been looking for—" This could be no other. This range belonged to one lion. That night Homer and I had a conference. It was, as we described it later, a "three coffee cup" session. We oiled our rifles and planned our approach for the next day.

Strategy is the stuff that achieves results. We had a plan. This brilliant idea would circumvent the usual stratagems of that wise old cat. Instead of cutting his track low and following him up those familiar slopes and canyons, we would circle high in the first place and cut in close behind him. It worked.

We had achieved a phenomenally early start. We were half way up the ridge between Pino and Bear Canyons before it was light enough to see. By early daylight we were angling across on those same high slopes that we usually achieved only my midmorning or noon. It was a master plan.

As we circled the head of Pino Canyon at the very foot of the straight cliff, we pointed out the places and spots which had meant so much in this greatest of lion hunts. There was the saddle through which Old Man Sandia had passed a dozen times. Below us in the distance was the timbered canyon where his wife had been killed. And not so far away the granite pinnacle where

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his two sons had laid on the hard rocks a few moments too long. These events seemed almost like history now; a story without an end.

It was Sue that opened up first. She barked two or three times with a rising inflection. Then in a minute, again. She had found something. The noise was coming from a header canyon below and ahead of us. It sounded like a track. It was.

As so many times before we rushed forward with eager expectancy. But this time we did not have to look at each other in tired disappointment. There was only one lion that could have made those fanned-out tracks in that dirt bank. It was he, the monarch of the Sandias.

The other dogs joined in. Bugger checked every track for himself. He wasn't going to take the word of a mere girl like Sue for anything so important as this. The dogs were running steadily now. The track was good. Eight or ten hours old, perhaps. But we were already high on the mountain. Our plan had worked.

Even the dogs on this climax to our hunt, seemed to show more than their usual persistence and tenacity on that track. Perhaps the smell of this particular lion was something special to them, just as the sight of those peculiar feet had long ago become to us.

Instead of angling higher into the limestone ledges where he had escaped us before, the lion took us obliquely down the slopes, crossing the many header canyons and gullies at the foot of the cliffs. As so many times before, he circled through oak patches and across rock slides, through the clustered timber of the canyon bottoms and along bare ridges with a restlessness that seemed an extraordinary thing. There were occasional scrapes on the trail by which this lion of lions warned away all other cats from this domain. In this day, too, the Old Man was apparently seeking his mate as though hoping to find her still alive after these many months.

In spite of our renewed predictions of an early morning end to this drawn-out business, the sun again mounted in the heavens as we unwound the trail. One gully, one canyon only led to another beyond, and the dogs were always ahead.

It was perhaps eleven o'clock when it happened. The excitement, as so many times before, had been drained from us by the

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gruelling exercise. The dogs barked intermittently, but always ahead over the next ridge, beyond the next clump of trees. With that startling suddenness that always happens when game breaks cover, there was a rush and roar of sound just beyond a tumble of gigantic boulders. The hounds had jumped the quarry. We had again come to a place where Old Man Sandia laid down to rest.

Again there was that electrifying exhilaration and the surge of expectancy that we might see the famous lion. We scratched and stumbled our way around the rock pile, straining to look ahead instead of watching our footing. The steady roaring bark of the dogs was already moving away down the slope, but still tantalizingly close. There was no doubt that Bugger and Sue and their canine friends were actually looking at the fleeing form of a certain old lion. What we would give for a fleeting glimpse of that bounding form!

But every rock that we surmounted only revealed another larger one. Beyond the jumble of boulders, on the ridge, there was a solid line of thick bushes and beyond that the timber. Already the noise of the chase was muffled as the dogs and the lion descended into the bottom of the next canyon. Homer and I jumped off the last boulder with our rifles wildly flung over our heads as though we were charging an enemy. I think that we whooped and yelled too as though to add to our clamor to the end of our famous antagonist. This was lion hunting at its best. There is no thrill that compares with moments like these. We had flushed regal game and the kill was near.

As we rushed down the slope of that canyon, stumbling and falling, protecting, with outflung arms, the sights of the rifles, we glanced across constantly for a glimpse of the lion ahead of the dogs. Perhaps in one of these chance openings in the trees there would be an opportunity. Just possibly a lucky shot would drop that old lion in his tracks. This would seem a more sporting end than shooting him in cold blood from a pine limb. Once I saw the lion, through some dark evergreen boughs where there was an opening! A tawny reddish form was mounting the opposite slope. I half-raised my rifle as the animal stopped and looked back. Then I saw the wildly-waving tail and the raised

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head. It was our dog, Sue, red as any lion, but not legitimate game.

We plunged down that canyon and up the farther slope. This was the ridge that separated Pino Canyon from a short but rocky gorge which is called Tabac Canyon. This country was the roughest in all the Sandias, but it offered no escape. On top of some boulder, in some thick spruce, and in a very few minutes, the end would come.

Homer and I had somehow become separated as we crested this last ridge. As I scrambled up the last few yards on my hands and knees, I could still hear the dogs booming ahead. I rested on a fallen log, sitting astride it like a horse. I held my breath for long moments to listen. There was no sound. A steady morning breeze welled out of the depths below and stirred the bright-colored oak leaves around me. The tips of the ridges were dressed in the colors of autumn. The blue shadows and the green of the pines and firs had never been more awe-inspiring. But there was no sound from the dogs. Not a whimper or a howl echoed up through the trees.

With a growing feeling of bewilderment I angled down the far slope, threading my way with some care among the bushes. This was the way the dogs had gone and there was no canyon into which they could have dropped so suddenly. There was no catastrophe which could have overcome all of our hounds at once.

I had just pushed back the raking limb of a small oak to make an opening for my face. Before I stepped through, I heard a sound, faint and unfamiliar. It was a whining bubbling noise which I could not place. What animal made that plaintive cry? I stepped through the screen of bushes and I saw a movement ahead. Then another, and another. There were animals all around me. I could hear their movements and see the outline of a back or the curve of a haunch, here and there. They were goats —a whole herd of them. But these were not the black-horned mountain billies of the northern regions. These were tousled-haired, multicolored farmyard goats of the ordinary New Mexican variety. Even as I moved among them, they stared at me and shifted uneasily to both sides.

Again I heard the blubbering, wailing noise and I saw an upright form among the goats. It was a small, native child with his

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hands to his face. He wore the wreck of a sombrero, with pieces of frayed felt around the edge. He had a torn shirt with one button in the middle which festooned unevenly over his multi-patched jeans. As I approached this spectacle, the little fellow took his doubled fists from his eyes for a moment and looked at me with a reddened, tear-stained face.

As though my appearance heralded another disaster, the lad burst out in a renewed fit of blubbering and sobbing. I saw he was a boy, a nice-looking lad, about eight years of age. But the rivulets of tears had washed creases through the dust of his face and there was a black smudge on his chin that made him look ludicrous and older than he was. Then I saw the body. The still form lay almost at the boy's feet. I quickly knelt beside the thing and put a hand beneath the foreleg to feel the heart. It was a billy goat, one of the best, with curved horns of magnificent proportions and a smell like the opening of a manhole cover. The goat lay quite still with the beard beneath his chin showing a suspicious streak of crimson blood. I lifted his head by one horn and looked at it quizzically. The base of the skull and the neck were a bloody pulp with a fragment of fresh bone protruding from the awful wound. The head of this he-goat had been bitten almost in two.

I straightened to place a comforting arm around the shoulder of the little goatherder. He continued to blubber and heave gigantic sighs with a vigor far beyond his years. "What happened, amigo mio?" I asked in a tone one uses with children. There was no answer, only a fit of coughing interspersed with wails and sobbing yells. "Muchacho, ha visto el leon?" Still no answer, although the truth was beginning to dawn on me with increasing conviction. None but a lion could have inflicted that wound and there was only one lion here—a certain old male lion fleeing for his life.

I turned half around with my arm still about the boy's shoulders to see Homer encouraging the dogs. The hounds were threading through the goatherd in bafflement. Occasionally they put their noses to the ground and wagged their tails feebly. Even I could smell the overpowering odor of those goats, however. Homer came up, bent over double like one of his hounds. He

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was searching the bare ground between the bushes for any sign of a track. It must be there. It had to be. We had chased a lion at a dead run into that small area only moments before.

"Frank, we've got to get those dogs away from those dad-blamed stinking goats," he said as he grasped a hound by the collar. I abandoned my young goatherd companion to his inconsolable grief and grasped a hound myself. Time was precious. We must circle wide around where the goats had been feeding to catch the spot where Old Man Sandia had left the area. Half leading, half dragging the dogs, we started the sweeping circle. We kept two or three hundred yards of unpolluted air between ourselves and the goat herd. As we dog-trotted to cut the track, we discussed the tragedy that had occurred here. "That billy must have tried to butt the Old Man," Homer commented grimly. "He won't butt any more. Did you look at his head?" I asked. Homer nodded affirmation and we continued our circle.

A half hour of precious time had elapsed since the fleeing lion had led us to the place of the goats. We had made a complete circle of the whole area and had returned again to the place on the slope where I had first heard the crying child. "That lion has to come out of this hillside somewhere," Homer said grimly as he squatted on his haunches. "He can't fly, or at least I don't think he can," he added lamely.

In a burst of grim determination, we took the dogs again and circled even wider around the goat herder and his charges and this time in the opposite direction. Again we completed a full circle with bafflement turning into certain conviction that Old Man Sandia had tricked us again. Late that afternoon we wearily turned down the slope toward the car. That was the last chase where we ever came even close to catching that green-eyed old monarch of the Sandia cliffs. Only one pair of human eyes in all of that time had ever actually seen the lion. Those were the tear-reddened eyes of a little boy goatherder, and he would tell us nothing in spite of all our coaxing.

The next year in our lion hunts we failed to find those familiar tracks of our old friend. Perhaps he had died a natural death in the Sandia Mountains that he loved so well. Maybe, too, he despaired of ever finding his mate and had left for other mountain

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ranges where persistent dogs and climbing men were not so frequent. It may have been mere chance that he eluded us so successfully and so long. Homer and I have talked about Old Man Sandia many times since, around the campfires of other lion hunts. It is our opinion that this venerable lion was strong and lucky too, but mostly smart.

CHAPTER IX

POISON CANYON

CASS GOODNER is a mountain man. He wears high-topped cowboy boots of his own design, and he pinches his sombrero in at the rim. He has keen eyes of the blue of a southwestern sky and the drawl of his voice reminds you of Wild Bill Cody. Cass caught his first lion when he was a kid in the Manzano Mountains near Mountainair, New Mexico. He told me about it once. He said it was a female that had some kittens in a little hole under an old log. There was snow on the ground and Cass told me that he trailed them and caught the whole family with a little short-tailed terrier mongrel. Cass Goodner has been hunting ever since.

In the months after the Old Man of the Sandias had escaped us so completely, our hunting enthusiasm and especially our confidence hit an all-time low. Our friends no longer stopped and asked us on the street how the lion hunting was. It was a forbidden subject and they all knew it.

Homer Pickens had moved to Santa Fe. Then the Second World War came with its hunting of a different variety. Friends went off and came back strangers to each other, or didn't come back at all. The familiar old dogs died. Eight years is a good span of life for a hunting hound and it had been over ten years since I had first started on those early lion trails. Bugger went to a hero's grave. Sue, too, and Chief and Buck and Trailer and all of the lion dogs that Homer Pickens and I had followed so many

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miles. It became more difficult too, to slip out on a lion chase when business was so pressing and a certain amount of money was to be maintained in the family exchequer. Only Cass Goodner survived these difficult times.

"You know, Frank," he told me one day, as we squatted over the carcass of a bear that we had just killed, "there must be some good answer to this question of how to get in enough hunting and get your business done too." I had always noticed, however, that when Cass Goodner heard a report of a lion or a bear, his business arranged itself so that he could go.

It was one of these guilty occasions that Cass and I were headed south toward the Magdalena Mountains near Socorro, New Mexico. Both Cass and I had done violence to our more pressing affairs. Monday morning, of course, would bring remorse and a double load of work.

But this was Friday evening. We were clipping along in an early summer twilight. Cass had his pickup truck fitted with a special body with two decks, like an over-and-under bed. On the lowermost level was the dog pack. There were two hounds of especial note. One was a heavy-faced brown and white spotted dog named "Drive." The other was a three-year-old female that Cass called "Sissy." She was a strumpet if I ever saw one, but had a nose as keen and mysterious as a radar set. There was an airedale too named Pancho and three other reddish, lop-eared hounds that were about to experience their first lion chase.

The top deck of Cass's truck was piled high with saddles and tarps, beds and the coffee pot—all of those things that mean excitement in the preparation for a hunt. There was a magnificent sunset that evening. A late spring wind had kicked up curls of dust from the sand flats and washes all afternoon. The air was still now, but the fine particles that yet hung on the breeze radiated an orangish glow in the slanting sun rays. The serrated pyramid of Robber Peak off to the west was covered with a halo of this flaming light. It was a magnificent spectacle and we were at peace. "That wind will sure make trailing hard tomorrow," Cass commented.

The Kelly Ranch lies in Water Canyon on the northern end of the Magdalena Mountains. It is one of those places that radiates atmosphere and hospitality. The building was sprawling and low

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with a vine-covered porch and a stack of stovewood out behind. Both before and around the house were towering cliffs of lava rock that formed the walls of Water Canyon. At the head of the canyon the great bulk of Magdalena Baldy confines the view on that side. Indeed, the Kelly Ranch gives a feeling of oppression at first, as though the tremendous forms of these scenic wonders dwarf humans and their houses too greatly.

If there was a feeling of apprehension around the house, there was none inside it. Rancher Kelly was a landmark himself and greeted us with that quiet affability that only the real gentry of these western lands acquire. Mrs. Kelly too, was that wonderful combination of efficiency, hospitality and a good cook. By day she taught school in the little town of Magdalena. In the evening or on weekends she was a rancher's wife and could discuss cattle and branding with the best of them.

Young Tom Kelly, the son, had just returned from the wars. He still looked a little military even in his battered sombrero hat and his cowboy boots. Tom had spent many months in the Philippines and there was a big set of caribao horns mounted on the wall to prove it.

We all sat around that evening with our feet on a bearskin rug to talk over the situation. It had been Rancher Kelly that had sent word to Cass that there were lions in these lava cliffs. Rancher Kelly's black hair was plastered to both sides of his head by the sweat of his sombrero. He reached up occasionally to smooth it back and always spoke in that same quiet manner, whether the subject was exciting or matter of fact.

"Sure been seeing lots of lion kills," he would say. "Right up there on the mesa came across one this afternoon." Kelly pointed vaguely with his gnarled thumb in the dark where the edges of the overhanging cliffs only dimly showed their outlines in the night. "Been fellows in here to catch them too, in years past, but they never seemed to be smart enough to do it."

The talk droned on, far into the night. The conversation turned from lions to the bear whose skin lay at our feet. He had been a stock killer and a hard beast to catch. There were stories too, of the mining camps in these same mountains and of gun fights in the streets of Magdalena in the early days. An evening with some of these old-timers at a western ranch is as exciting as

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a hunt itself, but then there was the morning and we would be up before the stars were dimmed.

We were out of bed and had saddled our horses before there was a suggestion of light. Mrs. Kelly had prepared for us one of those memorable ranch breakfasts that belies the old adage that man eats to live. Those eggs and bacon and that aromatic coffee made from the pure spring water from the cliff, were experiences in themselves.

The saddles were cold to the touch as we swung up in the stirrups. Even on a May morning it was still chilly in the Magdalenas. Rancher Kelly and his son Tom rode with us. Indeed I had never seen a rancher yet who couldn't leave his cattle and his chores for a day or two to join in on a lion chase. And then we needed them as guides. There were few places in those lava rims where a horse could get up and down. If you missed the spot, you might ride for miles without a possibility of getting through.

We jogged in the dark up an old mining road that led straight up the canyon. Occasionally our knees jostled together as our horses shifted from one side to another. We talked little and rode steadily as we meant to cover as much ground as we could before sun-up. The horses which the Kellys had so kindly offered us, were well-muscled beasts and used to the rugged terrain of these rough mountains. We had gone perhaps five miles by the time it was good daylight.

Kelly showed us cat tracks in the mud where two lions had crossed this same canyon perhaps a week before. The prints were now dried and blurred, but visible still. He told us too of the trouble he had been having with coyotes in these lava breaks. "Had to poison them out," he was saying. "They were killing too many calves." This was ominous news indeed, because poisoned territory was country which the lion hunter does not invade.

As an easy method of getting rid of coyotes and wolves these ranchers had the habit of putting strichnine pills in small pieces of tallow or "baits," and casting them abroad over the countryside. A lion hound is much like a coyote. His dog nose will detect a bait from a distance of several yards and unerringly lead him to it. In one gulp the mouthful is down his throat with the lethal pill inside. In only a few minutes there are fits and paralysis

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and your lion dog dies at your feet with his legs jerking spasmodically. Poisoned territory is no place for a dog pack.

Cass Goodner had known this before we started, but had decided to take the chance anyway. There were so many lions in this virgin country that if we were careful, we probably would make out all right. Perhaps none of our dogs would turn to one side of the trail and gulp down a moldy piece of beef tallow. We spurred our horses up alongside of Kelly's. "You're sure you know exactly where you put that poison?" Cass asked him anxiously. Now that we were actually in the country, it didn't seem so simple. Kelly only nodded as he jogged along and we fell back into single file again.

We were approaching an abandoned mine at the head of this old road. There were rotten timbers sticking out of the bushes here and there to show where miners' shacks had been. A false-fronted store hung crazily on the hillside even in this remote place. The mine shaft itself was just across a little hollow from us and there were pulleys, and old rusted wheels and the fallen stack of a forge, all decayed and jumbled together like the symbol of lost hopes.

Suddenly there was the crackle of branches and the rustle of sound in the undergrowth. A deer spurted out, then another and another. A whole line of them trotted at no great speed out of the bushes across the talus pile of the old mine. "Twenty-one, twenty-two," we counted together. The Magdalena Mountains are famous for their deer herds. Perhaps no other state in the Southwest can boast of an area where the deer grow as abundantly as in the Magdalenas. This volcanic soil seems to produce a luxuriance and an abundance that supports this tremendous deer population. It was not unusual to see them in bunches like this. This too, was the reason that the lions were here; where the deer are plentiful, so will the lions be also, if they are not killed off by men.

We found our first lion kill in a little bend of the old road, even before we reached the mine across the hollow. It had been a buck of goodly size and the lion had killed him on the bed of the old road itself, then dragged the carcass down the slope and buried it beneath the shade of a tree.

It was our intention, at Rancher Kelly's suggestion, to skirt

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the heads of the several canyons that radiated out from Magdalena Baldy like the spokes of a wheel. There was one lion especially, the track of which Kelly had noted repeatedly as he rode after his cattle. "He's a big one," he had said, "with a track like that," and he spread his rough and cracked rancher's hands out wide with the fingers distended. I had considerably more respect for the Kelly family's opinion of tracks and tracking before we were through.

There were lions on those cliffs all right. We passed one kill after another. Some of these Kelly had found before, while he was tracking a cow or circling on a trail. Others of these collections of bones and fragments of skin were new to us. As we had noted before, the majority of these kills were bucks showing the whitened pair of antlers of a fall or winter deer, and in some cases the withered stubs of horns that had been in the velvet. But all of these kills were old. Some of these deer had met their deaths weeks ago, others were months old.

We found another tragedy too, the only one which we could not blame on the lions. It was a dead deer like the rest. But this one had not been eaten upon, not even by coyotes. The animal lay curled up like a sleeping dog, with his horns erect and in place. From a short distance away, he looked as though he might rise at any moment and bound off with a crashing of brush.

I dropped off my horse and walked along the slope to examine the animal closely. It was a skeleton deer, with the dried skin still stretched over the bones. Here and there were the clumps of dead maggots and dried larvae that had eviscerated the beast months before. But the dead buck deer had one imperfection in his otherwise perfect form. His hind haunch, the one uppermost, looked bent a little. As I leaned over the carcass, I could see that the leg had been shot. The bullet had shattered the bone in the middle of the thigh and two or three white, jagged fragments of bone showed out through the hole in the skin. Here the dried-up maggots and larvae were the thickest, around what must have been a terrible wound. Some hunter had shot a little too far to the right, and the wounded animal had limped off to die. This buck had six points on each side—a magnificent head.

But in spite of these evidences of death and the scattered bones of dozens of lion kills, deer were everywhere. Cass was hard put

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to it to keep his untrained pups from dashing off after every deer that we jumped. The warm smell of fleeing deer is perfume to a young dog's nostrils. But there was poison in those canyons. We wanted no hounds wandering unguided in the undergrowth.

We skirted the flank of Magdalena Baldy, rising and falling over the little header canyons that grooved the bulk of this magnificent peak at the very center of the Magdalena range. For a fleeting moment we could look down the length of Six-Mile Canyon—a straight-sided gorge weaving between mauve-colored cliffs of lava and tufa rock. We crossed the head of Ranhel Canyon and by noon we had dipped into the uppermost reaches of Saw-mill Canyon, many miles from our original starting point.

"I've seen his track here every time I've ridden cattle in this canyon," Kelly was saying over his shoulder. "He's a big one too," he added, as though speaking to the hound that trotted ahead of his horse. The rest of us renewed our vigilance, looking for lion tracks. Cass Goodner renewed his, taking care of his dogs. I could see by the worried lines on his face that he had regretted a thousand times bringing them in to this poisoned country.

In the next few miles of that spectacular ride the Kellys, father and son, showed us an exhibition of tracking that even Cass had never seen. Time and again the old man swung sideways in the saddle to motion with a sweep of his arm toward some obscure mark or disturbance at the edge of the trail.

"Lion, two or three days old, maybe," he would say in his quiet way.

The mark would be scarcely distinguishable at the edge of the pine needles and at that, after two or three hounds had passed over it. On another occasion he seemed to show more than his usual quiet interest.

"Bear," Kelly said, pointing to a rock. "There's only supposed to be one left around Baldy here, and he's a sizable one."

I looked at the stone he indicated and saw that it had been moved a little from its resting place in the duff of the forest floor. The bear, lean and gaunt from the hunger of spring, had been turning over stones to lick up the meager ants and insects that he might find beneath. But we were not interested in bear, although we had cause to revise this interest a little later.

Every time we saw cattle in the distance, the Kellys showed their

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greatest interest. Indeed, it was a constant marvel how they worked cattle in this unbelievably rough country by any method. Their animals were scattered over mountain territory, twenty miles each way. There were some of the roughest and deepest canyons of all the western mountains creasing this terrain like the wrinkles in a crumpled-up piece of paper. No wonder the Kellys were so good at seeing and reading tracks. It was the only way they could follow their stock in a territory the size of a big eastern county and most of it on edge at that.

We slid our horses down a little deer trail into the head of Sawmill Canyon. Here from beneath the horizontal layers of ancient lava flows, trickles of water from the winter's snow flowed down the surface of the rock in festoons of green algae. Around the moisture were ferns and the multitudinous wild flowers that only the moisture of a western canyon can bring forth. In the floor of the gorge was a considerable little stream which babbled with a satisfying noise over the gravel and sand of its bed.

The water ran glinting in the noon day sun for a hundred yards or so, then disappeared entirely to reappear again farther down the bed of the canyon. Beside one of these short, pleasant stretches of stream we stiffly dismounted. The horses eagerly gulped down the bright water as we turned them loose. We sat together rather disconsolately. It was midday and we had not yet found a track.

I had just started to peel an orange, when there was the bark of a hound close behind me. Then there was another dog, then all the rest together, yelping and screeching in ecstasy. The half-peeled orange dropped into the damp gravel and was ground underfoot as I turned. A few yards behind us a harried porcupine was mounting the slender bole of an aspen with amazing speed. Leaping and bouncing beneath the climbing animal were several foolish hounds. We turned back to our luncheon in disgust. Our nerves had been keenly keyed for the bark of a dog on the trail of the big lion.

We had finished our meager meal and were hesitating a moment in the shade of the canyon bottom before we re-bridled our horses. We raised our heads together. There was the bark of a dog, above us and up the canyon, the way from which we had come. It was Old Drive. He had been circling on the ledges

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as we sat choking down dry sandwiches. When Old Drive barked, it usually meant game.

In a moment we could see the dog. He was coming down the canyon along the side slope, two or three hundred feet above our heads. We could see clearly as the hound turned uphill for a moment the brown fleur-de-lis that was the distinctive mark at the base of his tail. Drive barked steadily, but not with the ecstasy that he usually displayed on a hot trail. He would need some help.

Cass and I dropped our bridle reins and started up on foot through a small fissure that slanted through the rock on the side of the canyon. The other dogs were scattering among us, eager to be in on any excitement. Cass split off to see if Drive was on the right end of the track and I circled ahead along the canyon wall. I had just climbed high enough to be level with the trailing dog when I saw some tracks. There was a deer runway, clear and distinct on the slope for a few yards. In the film of dust in this little trail I could make out clearly the prints of lion feet. It was a medium-sized lion, but as we had often observed, a lion was a lion, big or little. This wasn't the big Tom that Rancher Kelly had told us of, but he was big enough.

"Here he goes, right along this little trail," I called down to the Kellys in the canyon below.

There was a ring of satisfaction in my voice, as I was deriving exquisite pleasure from being able to show the Kellys a lion track. The whole morning they had been pointing them out to me. I got the camera all ready, as I thought this would be a golden opportunity to photograph the hounds on a track coming straight toward me. I could hear the bellow of Old Drive as he came along the side of the canyon. In just a moment he would pass by, following these tracks which I had already found ahead of him. I waved in a condescending manner to the Kellys below. Drive came on, trailing steadily, and then to my consternation passed a hundred yards above me on the slope and continued down the canyon. The Kellys turned back to their horses with no comment. Picking up the camera I scrambled farther up to see what could have happened.

Above I found other lion tracks in the dirt between the stones. So two lions had passed this way, following parallel courses.

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Neither one was the big track of the Tom lion that we coveted, but then he could wait.

"There are two tracks along here," I called down to the canyon bottom, now out of sight. I could imagine the look of disbelief that the Kelly family must have worn at that moment.

Cass and I yelled for the Kellys to lead our horses down the canyon and we followed on foot. The trailing was good but certainly not spectacular. In a short time the two lions led us higher up on the canyon wall and back under the cliffs into a little side canyon or rincon. I don't think either Cass or I had noticed during our intent trailing with the dogs that the weather had taken a decided turn for the worse.

A dark cloud obscured the sun. Billows of gray mist were swinging around the shoulder of Baldy Mountain, up at the head of the canyon. The first intimation that we had of our misfortune was the spat of a raindrop on the back of my hand. In a moment the steady fall of the storm was making little noises on the leaves of the trees around us. In another moment it had turned to driving sleet and fine particles of hail. It was one of those freak storms that come in the spring of the year, and that would soon pass. But we cursed it with all of the vehemence that we might have lavished on a tornado.

In ten minutes the dogs were in difficulty on the track. The steady beat of the hard particles of snow and ice was scouring out all vestige of the lion smell that would lead us to this pair of cats. A short time more and only Old Drive was still on the track, barking intermittently where he could find the smell in sheltered places beneath the trees. As usual, we had difficulty calling the old rascal back. His tenacity was going to hold him to the track no matter what the difficulties might be.

It was actually only by running up alongside of him and grasping him by the collar that we got him to turn at all. Poor Drive. He looked so resentful when we pulled him around and started back. But there was no use following those fading tracks with the heavens against us. We watched the hound carefully as we went back to join the Kellys. Any relaxation of vigilance would give the dog an opportunity to slip wide around us and go back and continue on the trail. Such is the determination of a lion dog.

When there was nothing to be said, the Kellys usually didn't

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say it. We simply swung aboard our horses and started on the long loop back toward the Kelly ranch. These cattlemen knew another trail by which we could cross these same canyons farther down and thus cut a new piece of country. Of course any old lion track would be obliterated by the baby blizzard which was even now fizzling to a drizzly end. But then we might bump right into something. This was certainly lion country.

The rain stopped completely and the lava rocks dried with only little puddles in the vesicular surfaces. The round lichens, with their gorgeous orange and green colors, looked refreshed by the moisture. There was a smell of wet pine needles in the air and we could see from our position on the side of the canyon, the flats below and the ribbon of the Rio Grande River in the far distance. Far out on the river flats the cloud shadows of the storm that had just passed over us moved with fingers of rain trailing from them.

We climbed steeply out of Sawmill Canyon and crossed the ridge back into Ranhel. We passed another miner's cabin, rotting and deserted, with the whitened skull of a horse stuck up on one of its protruding timbers. We crossed Ranhel Canyon with a steep sliding descent that would have struck terror to the heart of a denizen of Wall Street. It was late afternoon as we topped the ridge between Ranhel and Six-Mile canyons. We were jogging along, easing the stiff places as best we could, with that lackadaisical manner that one always assumes when he is satiated with scenery and eager to be back at the coffee pot. The dogs too had lost interest and were trotting along behind our horses without any attempt to pick up a trail.

As we passed the mouth of a little hollow, I saw out of the corner of my eye the form of one of the dogs running forward to the left. I shifted my position in the saddle and turned to look. It was Sissy, the little strumpet. She had her hound nose lifted to the evening wind. She's probably scented another lion kill, I thought to myself. We've seen a dozen of them already and no lions have eaten on them for a month. I turned again and eased the reins which I had involuntarily checked when I looked at the dog.

I started violently as Sissy gave a barking roar beyond a fringe of young pine trees. She barked again yards farther on. She was

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trailing and running. This was not just the casual curiosity of a hound sniffing around a long-dead deer. Drive joined in. Then the other dogs. They were all barking together, barking and running. Good old Sissy. We'd collect something yet before that day was out.

Cass passed me at a full gallop, plunging recklessly into the apparently impenetrable line of trees that grew in the hollow. I spurred my horse to follow and we were off at a blinding pace, head bent low to avoid the whipping branches. I hugged the neck of my horse, first on one side and then on the other, as I sought to avoid leaning trees and clutching, dead limbs. I could feel the horse jumped stiffly beneath me as he hurtled logs and rocks. There was the sear of pain in my left shoulder as some unseen snag bit deeply and ripped away a long three-cornered piece of my jacket. There was no time to view the damage, or even to raise a tentative hand to feel how deep the wound was. This was a chase. We were going like the wind through country where we wouldn't have walked our horses if we had stopped to think about it.

In a flash between trees I saw Cass Goodner ahead. He said something over his shoulder which I did not catch, as I at that moment passed through another flurry of splintering dead branches and whipping limbs. Cass turned again and this time I heard the one word "Bear!" and something else. I looked now to right and left and, by sawing on the reins, slowed the horse a little. The animal, infected by the excitement of the chase, was difficult to check at all. I almost bumped into Cass and his horse. He was cursing fluidly and with a tremendous amount of expression.

"Of all the dad-blamed, black bottomed, wrinkle-bellied, sons of so-and-so, we have to get after a bear." I looked where he pointed. Sure enough in the grass at the foot of the trees were several stones, all recently overturned from their sockets in the dirt and vegetation. The earth was moist beneath them and the grass stems white. There was a claw mark by one, where our bruin friend had tentatively raked his paw to stir out the ants. Cass was letting loose another flood of invective.

"Only one dad-blamed, blankety-blank bear on the whole mountain, and we had to bump right into him."

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Even as he spoke we could hear the ecstatic cries of Sissy and Drive as they pursued the fleeing bear, up the ledges of Baldy Mountain. Cass did not need to tell me that a bear, thin and lean in the spring, might run twenty miles before he came to bay if he did at all. And then this wasn't bear season.

It was a big space of slide rock that saved us. This is the only good thing I can say about slide rock, for it is usually awful stuff. Somehow the dogs lost the bear's trail for a moment among the tumbled fragments at the foot of the cliff and we caught up to them. I have never seen such resentment as there was in those dog faces as we pulled them bodily away from the track. They actually sulked as we led them back to the trail. I didn't blame them a great deal. At least the bear chase had been exciting.

As we dropped down into Six-Mile Canyon we were as disgruntled a party as I ever saw on a hunt. Earlier in the day the spectacular cliffs of this lava gorge had made a memorable picture. The reddish rock and the green of the pines made contrasting colors in barbaric combinations. Now in the late afternoon, the shadows of the canyon depths were dusky blue and mysterious below us. But it was a deep canyon and difficult to cross. It would be full dark before we topped the ridge on the far side. To make matters even less romantic, Kelly reminded us: "Six-Mile is a poison canyon. It's full of it."

All we needed was to lose a dog to make this fiasco complete. Cass hunched on his horse as he always did when he was mad. He whistled the dogs in close to him and we started the descent down the cliffs.

The trail that we followed was a game trail and cattle path. It zigzagged and switched back and forth as it wound down the ledges. Here we slid through a crack where our knees brushed the rock. Beyond we doubled down a talus slope in a shower of small stones. On the lichen-covered rocks by my gloved hand I could see ancient rock writings of other men now dead these many centuries. The Indians too had used this trail and had left the circles and outlines of animals etched into the rock where the lichens now grew. We walked our horses single file on the ancient trail and rounded a shoulder on the very lip of the steepest part of the descent.

"Look at the deer," some one said behind me. I raised my head

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and realized I had been riding slumped over in the saddle, but whether from fatigue or discouragement I wasn't sure. There were some deer sure enough. The animals were across the canyon from us but at no great distance and about level with the trail which we followed. There were seven or eight red colored does or bucks. It was impossible to tell which they were in May, as all of them are hornless. At that time the deer skittered up the farther slope in a scattered group, obviously frightened. But what of it? We had seen three or four bunches of deer during the day and some of them far larger than this one.

I dropped my eyes again to the treacherous trail with no comment. Suddenly I jerked on the reins of my tired horse. One of those deer was certainly peculiar looking. The impression of a moment ago had just registered. One of the red deer on the far slope ran in a graceful arching lope rather than the static bounds of ordinary fleeing deer. I looked again, intently this time, at the one deer which handled himself so peculiarly.

"Good God—it's a lion," I gasped. I pointed with a quivering hand as the rest of the company piled up behind me.

It *was* a lion, a big red, running lion with a black-tipped tail trailing out behind.

"He's after that deer—*look!*" said Cass.

"Man, look at the lion," shouted one of the Kellys behind. The silent company of a moment before was babbling like a bunch of school boys around a fire engine.

The running lion was angling toward one of the fleeing deer. It was full grown deer and the frantic animal was running up the slope with jerky bounds which covered tremendous distances at every leap. But in a few seconds, a few more bounds, the lion would converge upon the hapless animal for the kill. The easy motion of the running cat looked so effortless and yet it was so swift. We were about to see across Six-Mile Canyon, what so few human eyes had ever seen before—a mountain lion actually make a kill. But we talked excitedly among ourselves as we sat our horses during this tense drama.

"Now he's got him," said some one behind me in a voice high pitched with tension.

The lion was almost beside the leaping deer. In another stride he would make the fatal jump that would carry him onto the

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deer's back with curved claws raking for a hold. But that jump was never made. In the middle of a bound, the cat seemed to hesitate, then stopped and turned his head to look straight at us.

Fools—we had talked too loud. Some fragment of our excited conversation had carried across the canyon to warn the hunting lion. There is nothing like the sound of the human voice to frighten the ears of the wild. The lion crouched motionless where his last bound had carried him. Only his tail waved from side to side sinuously. Even at that distance we could see the lighter-colored patch of his cat face and the triangles of his ears as they strained to catch any further hostile sound from us. It was, perhaps, two hundred yards across the canyon to where the scene had taken place. We could not have had a better view. But our only reaction was one of bitter disappointment. The scattered deer were already well up the slope and disappearing in the heavier timber on top of the ridge.

There was one particular deer among them that must have wondered how the hot breath of death was so mysteriously removed from his back. None of us seemed to think of our rifles, although the shot would have been a long one for the carbine saddle guns that we carried. It seemed minutes before the cougar moved at all. Then he turned and, with a cat-like motion, sat down on the slope and curled his tail around him on the ground. It was the action of any tabby cat who feels himself secure on his own garbage pile. The lion continued to sit there as we whispered among ourselves.

We may have botched a lifetime opportunity to see a cougar make a kill, but we had the satisfaction of having saved a deer. Too, the chance of seeing a lion which was not pursued by dogs was rare enough in itself. Our hounds, with typical canine myopia, had not yet seen the lion across the canyon nor sensed his presence.

"We can be on his track in ten minutes," Cass said with some optimism.

"Better make it twenty," young Tom Kelly added looking at the canyon below us.

"Ten or twenty, hell—Let's get started," rejoined Cass irritably. "It's going to be dark soon."

We stealthily urged our horses to a fast walk down the awful

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trail. We flinched as every boulder rolled loose or a horse rasped an iron shoe against the rock. But each time we stole a glance across the canyon, there was the big cat, sitting as before, staring with avid curiosity at the human cavalcade.

At the very bottom, Six-Mile Canyon ends in a straight drop. The trail descends precariously behind a section of the red cliff that had fallen away in some volcanic upheaval of by-gone geological ages. The curious cougar was still sitting silent on the slope above, as we disappeared from sight into the bottom of the canyon. It was gloomy there and the chill of evening made us button our jackets. This was a poison canyon too, and at any moment one of our valuable dogs might nose out and swallow a lethal pill of strychnine. But we smiled at each other and trotted our horses across the canyon floor. Rancher Kelly took the lead to show us the only place where we might get our horses up the raw wall of the canyon. He rode unerringly to a steep slope between the cliffs where a gully had gouged the lava rock, making a gap like a cathedral doorway. We spurred our tired mounts through the gap and up the slope beyond. In a few yards we swung off of our saddles and climbed ahead, leading the panting horses zig-zag up the incline. Never once did we pause for breath nor allow the plunging horses to stop. We climbed up and slipped halfway back with each step, tripping on our trailing chaps which we did not take time to remove.

In fifteen minutes by my watch, we had climbed out of the steep bottom of the canyon and were slanting back across the more gentle slope where we had first seen the deer. There were their tracks in the volcanic earth of the hillside. The cloven hoofs had made deep gouges in the dirt, wide spread and with the dew claws showing. These deer were running. This was the very slope where we had spotted the deer and the lion. Where was the lion? The canyon side which we had seen so plainly from across the gorge now looked different. Trees were larger than they had appeared and the terrain rougher. But there was the rock slide we had marked from across the canyon. The cougar had sat down just at the side of it.

The dogs were circling wide. They had caught some of our infectious enthusiasm and sensed that game was near. Sissy barked first. It was right among the tracks of the fleeing deer. That was

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where the lion had been running. Drive and Sissy together mounted the slope tracing out the course where the lion had chased the deer. A short distance above us they stopped, confused and circled a moment. That would be where the casual lion had seated himself. But he was gone. No matter, it would be short work to follow a cat tracks as fresh as that one. We whistled encouragingly to the dogs. Still they sniffed in an inane manner around the spot where the lion had paused. Five precious minutes passed. Cass felt annoyed. These dogs' reputations were his reputation. The twilight shadow was already beginning to creep up the canyon wall. We must press on.

Cass and I walked among the dogs to help if we could. We climbed farther up the slope where the deer had gone. Perhaps we could find a lion track between the stones. We *must* find one. We didn't have much time.

While our companions breathed the horses behind us, Cass and I circled back and forth over the upper slope. We cut in concentric circles above the place where the lion had sat down. The trail had to be there. The dogs circled with us but with never a sign that we crossed fresh lion scent. We could easily see where the deer had gone but the lion had vanished on phantom wings. Drive, with his typical bull headedness, kept going back to the spot where we had seen the lion and barking there. We sympathized with him but this wishful thinking wouldn't help a bit. We were racing darkness. On one of these excursions below us, Drive broke into a series of trailing barks and started down the slope the way we had come.

"The dad-blamed, hard-headed dog is back tracking—Drive, come here, you son of a so and so," Cass bawled. Drive lifted his head for a moment, then went on trailing on the back track. Cass stalked down the slope and yanked the tenacious hound roughly by the collar.

"Are you going to come up here and help us or do we have to shoot you instead of the lion," Cass addressed the dog as he dragged him back up the slope.

A fateful half hour went by. We were frantic. We had never had a fresher track to follow and we couldn't even start it off of the slope. The cougar, which we had actually seen, had jumped into the air and vanished. It was the most humiliating defeat

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we had ever suffered. The Kellys on their horses had already started up the ridge toward the ranch.

Cass and I sat down disconsolately in the dirt. Drive and Sissy looked abashed but continued to search for the phantom track. We were licked. As though to make matters worse, Drive opened up below us. That contemptible, hard-headed hound! He had gone back on the track again and was moving toward the bottom of the canyon now lost in darkness. I was of a mind to let him get poisoned and good riddance. Any dog that would lose a lion track fifteen minutes old wasn't worth his hamburger.

But wait—Cass and I stood up together. Drive's rolling voice was turning down the canyon. He was on the trail. That clever lion had doubled straight toward us when we disappeared from his sight, then dropped down toward the bottom of the canyon. We had been certain that he had gone in the direction the deer had fled. Good old Drive! Get him boy! Sissy was with Drive now, following down the canyon bottom. The dogs were making the lava walls reverberate with their barking as though they too wanted to make up the lost time. But the stars were already beginning to show in the eastern sky.

"Where are you?" came a voice faintly to us from the top of the ridge. "There's poison in the canyon." Poison—we had forgotten in the excitement of finding the track. Even now Drive was following where the poison lay. Scattered among the rocks and sticks in the dusk were many little pills of strychnine each rolled in a mouldy piece of tallow. It would take but a moment for the faithful Drive or Sissy to swing to the side with unerring nose and gulp down a piece of death. And yet even now the lion was close. Could we make it? Could our dogs pass through the poison and tree the lion? The two dogs paused on a small cliff near the canyon floor where the lion had jumped down. The hounds barked furiously at the hot lion smell that radiated from the rocks. They hesitated a minute as they circled to find an easier way down off the cliff. Cass was ahead of me and it was now so dark near the canyon bottom that I could scarcely make out his outline in the gloom. The white patches of Drive's mottled coat I could still see, but Sissy was all but invisible. The dogs' steady barking on the lion trail suddenly turned to a whine in the darkness ahead.

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Then I saw Cass bending over his dogs. His back and head were bent low like a man who had been beaten in a fight. He was holding the struggling hounds by their collars. The decision was made. Poison canyon had won. A certain red lion in those dark depths must have wondered why the pursuit was suddenly silent—why he had escaped so easily. But two weary men and two whining hounds started up the darkened slope with the conviction that one particular lion bore a charmed life. As far as I know the lucky lion still chases deer on the lava rims of Poison Canyon.

CHAPTER X

MOONLIGHT JAGUAR

WE were going to a dance that night. It was one of those spur-of-the-moment ideas, that is, our attendance at this dance. It was a few years before the last war and I was camped with a friend of mine, a lion-hunting friend, who ran his dogs along the southernmost fringes of the State of Arizona. The evening of the dance—it was in early summer as I recall—started out in the most matter-of-fact manner and ended up with bizarre complications. These complexities were all caused by one big, yellow-and-black spotted jaguar.

These beautiful leopard cats or “tigres” as the native Mexicans call them, are rare in our United States. They are southern beasts by nature and by choice. One normally associates the leopard-spotted jaguar with steaming jungles and the glossy, tropical vegetation of the Mexican hot land and the tropics of Central and South America. But these great cats occasionally make forays north of the border. There is one record of a jaguar mother raising a litter of young in the mountains of California. Occasional jaguars have astounded the good people of southern Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. In many a lion camp we had talked over the possibility of a jaguar encounter. The eventuality seemed remote, however, and only one lion hunter with whom I had talked had ever actually seen one.

Most of our conversations took the form of projected trips down into Old Mexico to get on the trail of one of these devil-cats. The

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story of the American mountain lion would indeed be incomplete without at least a passing acquaintance with his cousin, the jaguar. But all of these speculations and wishes had been purely academic up to the time that my friend and I started out on a certain May night to attend a dance in Tucson, Arizona.

The evening was cool and a brilliant moonlight covered the white granite rocks and the darker splotches of the trees and shrubs with a romantic lover's light. My grizzled companion was anything but a lover, but we enjoyed the moonlight together. My friend, incidentally, prefers to remain anonymous in this jaguar adventure.

"'Tain't fitten," he told me once some time after our foray, "to let things like that get around when a man lives right in the same country."

He was one of those usually unknowable men that had been born right on the border and had lived the life of both sides in a colorful and at times adventuresome career. He was unkempt and smelled of horses and dogs. A flap of his black sombrero hung down at one side like the dejected ear of a hound. He was a man who usually spoke only when something important needed to be said. That something seemed to be in order right then.

"Perty, ain't it," he commented as he drove his battered old pick-up truck along the moonlit road. I nodded assent. The jagged, arid tips of the Patagonia Mountains seemed as clear and bright in this nightly splendor as they had been under a hot May sun. We were driving slowly. Neither one of us wanted especially to get to the dance. We needn't have worried, for we never arrived within miles of the festivities on that occasion.

We were slanting up a curving hill and crossing at the same time one of those big dry washes that are the rivers of this arid land. The white sand fragments of the bottom of the wash were smooth and unbroken and reflected the full moon with more than usual brilliance.

But no. The even surface of the fine gravel was not quite unmarred by any mark or disturbance. I thrust my hand suddenly against the base of the windshield as the pick-up truck slid to a stop in a cloud of following dust.

My friend had seen those marks too. He backed the truck up

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a few yards and we leaned out of the car window together. They certainly looked like cat tracks. They had that characteristic roundness and the even spacing of the imprints looked familiar too. We sighted along them over across the wash where they disappeared on the farther bank. We got out of the car and knelt together by the round impressions. They did look like lion tracks, but they were as big as a man's outstretched hand and looked even larger by the light of the moon.

"Tigre!" said my friend under his breath as he crouched from one of the tracks to the other as though to satisfy himself that that was actually the case.

"Tigre," he said again and this time with the absolute conviction of a man who knows. I felt a tingle of anticipation pass over me. A jaguar! My first, and well north of the Mexican border.

Not only that but these tracks looked as crisp and fresh as our own tire tracks in the fine gravel beside them. Of course in this dry country one must view such things with caution. In this almost rainless region, tracks may stay fresh-looking for days or even weeks. Only the desert winds that fan out of the flat lands of Old Mexico will whip the sand and dust particles so as to obscure an imprint like these.

We slewed the truck around so as to focus the uncertain headlights of the venerable old wreck on the tracks of the jaguar. We even went as far as to wipe some of the accumulated grime from a cracked headlight to help us with our examination. A dog whimpered from the back of the truck.

The dogs! I for one had forgotten that we had them along at all. But of course we did. There was no person with whom to leave them at our camp in the Patagonia Mountains and the decked-over body of the truck was the best place for them to stay anyhow. Dogs at a dance would not be especially opportune, but there wasn't going to be any dance, at least for us.

My companion was already undoing the chains that held the tail-gate of the truck. As it flapped down, the dogs cascaded out in one solid rush, as though sensing the excitement which we felt ourselves. We were miles from our camp and our horses. We were miles from any place else, for that matter, but we were starting on a jaguar hunt then and there. We slipped a rifle from its boot where it hung beside the windshield and parked the old

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truck farther off the road. In this peculiar manner began one of the longest hunts that we ever had.

Even while we were making our preparations for departure—sketchy as they were—the hounds had been circling in the vicinity of the wash, obviously delighting in the coolness of the evening air. Then a dog barked in a fringe of bushes beyond us. It was a tentative bark, closely followed by the long, rolling howl of a hound that is on the trail. The other dogs around us pricked up their ears and stopped a second as though they said to one another “Old Jim has found a track in this place and at night? It seems impossible.”

But the hounds went to see for themselves in that same fringe of bushes. In a matter of seconds there were three or four other dog voices added to the noise that rolled out over the moonlit landscape.

The dog pack moved ahead along the huge round prints the jaguar had left behind. We did not go fast. It soon developed that the tracks were not as fresh as we had hoped. One or two days old, perhaps, from the way the dogs worked. But we moved steadily, nonetheless. Actually, it was fortunate that the track was not any fresher than it was. The dogs might have run off and left us entirely in the moonlit splendor.

With ease, we moved along steadily with them. We enjoyed the scenery and the coolness of the dry air. There was a suggestion of a smell of blossoming yuccas and ironwood. This is the time of year when the desert plants show their glory to the world in blossoms of unbelievable beauty.

As we walked along, we angled away from the road and soon lost consciousness of its whereabouts entirely. In between the barking of our hounds we could hear the cackle and yapping of a group of coyotes, also enjoying the moonlight. Once we disturbed an owl that slipped away from a low tree on silent wings. For the most of this eerie journey, we seemed to be the only living things in the mountains. Even the peaks themselves floated in a white light made unreal by peculiar shadows and the ghostly stems of desert plants that seemed to have no body. Through this mystic cosmos we moved as in a dream, disturbing the unreality with the barking of our dogs.

Only occasionally could we see the track of the big cat. For the

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rest of the time we relied upon the hounds who were picking up the scent of the jaguar here and there on sharp rocks and in the places where his spotted body had rubbed against twigs and branches.

On and on we went, one beautiful scene giving way to another. Neither of us seemed to mind spending a sleepless night. Certainly we did not care about missing the dance. Even now the painted people in the glow of some artificial bulbs were going through their silly gyrations, urged on by the hacking strains of some popular piece that they had heard so many times before. While outside and beyond these infinitesimal splendors of man—the real wonder of the universe was to be seen on every hand. The moonlight track that we followed that night was one of those never-to-be-forgotten happenings that gives real meaning to life. Without such things human existence here on earth would be a mean travail indeed.

As the stars slowly dipped into the eastern horizon, we found that we had been angling toward the foothills on the western slopes of the mountains. The track crossed each canyon on a diagonal and we followed down each ridge, farther than we climbed the next one. The rose-tinted glow of the sunrise seemed to supplant the white light of the moon gradually with no abruptness from one to the other. It was one of those pale sunrises with the yellowness of hot metal around the edges that gives promise of heat and a burning day to follow.

We stopped by a cattle trough in the head of a canyon and drank gratefully from the barely trickling pipe. The dogs too lapped eagerly where the cool stuff slipped over the edge of the trough in a green slime.

As the morning light grew stronger we examined the details of the jaguar track. In one place the animal had stepped squarely in a patch of sand. The print showed all of the usual cat characteristics—the roundness, the evenly spaced toes with no claw marks, the three lobes at the rear of the pad. But the track was enormous, much larger than the biggest male lion track I had ever seen.

"Tigers are bigger than lions," my companion was saying. "They've got bigger feet and they're half again heavier. Wait till you see the head of this boy looking at you out of a juniper tree, snapping his teeth in your face." He gave a dry chuckle.

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"Jaguars has got a head as big as this," and he made a circle with his arms to indicate a head of enormous proportions compared with any cougar head. "We'll most likely lose some dogs, though," he added more grimly as we started on after the hounds. "Tigers are death on dogs. They'd just as leave stay on the ground and kill some dogs as climb out of the way. My friend, Aragon, who has a ranch down by Cananea followed one of these spotted cats with nine hounds. The tiger killed every one of them, ripped them open at the belly. 'Nother friend of mine borrowed two of my dogs trying to catch a jaguar on his place—"

I never heard the end of the story, nor what had happened to the two dogs on that particular jaguar hunt. My old companion had a way of walking on ahead while he was conversing with you and not paying any particular attention whether you could hear him or not. Often, I only heard the first or last of one of his innumerable stories and I suspect that there were still others that I never heard any of at all. This didn't seem to bother him, however, as he had an inexhaustible supply. My friend also had an intimate knowledge of these southern mountains and the people who lived there. Without this knowledge our moonlight jaguar hunt would have been a very austere affair.

"Old man Gardner's got a little spread over the hill here," my friend told me out of the corner of his mouth. "We'll pick up some horses there."

Frankly at that particular moment I was far more intrigued with the idea of a breakfast than a horse. At this cow camp, however, we got both. A single cowboy was just cutting off some slabs of beef from a haunch of meat that hung from one of the roof beams as we approached. He cut off two more slabs before he answered our cryptic "howdy" and turned into the little cabin. We followed him in and did our best to keep out of his way as he whipped up a light snack of beans, beef, baking powder biscuits and gravy. It was wonderful.

During the meal our cowboy acquaintance became more voluble through a mouthful of biscuit. It seems that he had to ride that day over some of the high country to which he pointed with a gravy-stained fork. There was a bunch of cattle that had taken to the rough rocks and brush.

During these chance meetings in out of the way cow camps, it

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takes a certain amount of requisite time before any direct question can be put to a stranger. Although this man had plied us with beef and biscuits and had kicked one or two of our pups that had followed us into the cabin, he had asked no question about our business or where we had come from or where we were going. This ranch reticence is all right in its place, but I was fairly bursting with the news.

At the very end of the meal, with a forced casualness which I had assumed after being in this country for some time, I remarked in an off-handish manner: "We're following a jaguar." I thought I perceived a flicker of excitement in the cowboy's face and he wiped the last remnant of gravy from his plate with a fragment of a biscuit that moved with quickened tempo. "That so?" was his only comment. I noticed in a few moments, however, that he was saddling three horses.

In a few moments we were ready. The man had abandoned any idea of going after stray cattle. When there's a hunt and hunting dogs all ready, what red-blooded cowboy could resist?

The three of us, well-mounted on hardened but unromantic-looking cow ponies, rounded the ridge that separated us from the trail of the jaguar. The time-trained eyes of the cowboy and my friend soon picked up the trail of the rest of the dogs and their quarry. In a half hour of riding, we could again hear the desultory barks of the dog pack ahead. As we came closer to them we could hear the panting of their breath and as we stepped off of our horses to see how the track was going, our canine companions crowded around us as though asking us to do something about the increasing heat.

The sun was by now high over the mountains. The foothills and the plain beyond began to dance with the anticipated heat of a hot day. May is a hot time in these southern regions. But there was nothing to be done except to push on in the hope that we might catch the jaguar frittering away his time in the cool shade of some rocky ledge. We urged the dogs on and they took up the track again, although going with maddening slowness.

By midday our progress had slowed down to a snail's pace. We stopped in the shade of a little group of trees in the very bottom of the valley and ate some cold biscuits. There was a small seep here which had been developed into a cattle watering place. A

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scraggly remnant of green reeds clung around the edge of the water hole like the fringe of hair on a monk's head. A hot cloud of little brown mosquitoes welled up from the grass as we stumbled toward the water. It would never do to drink, but the dogs were not so particular. One by one we immersed the hounds in the cool water and washed their faces and eyes with the stagnant stuff. Their sighs of contentment at this cooling process were almost human.

We stayed two or three hours in the shade of the little trees in the edge of the valley. We caught up on a little of the sleep that we had missed the night before, although for myself it was a fitful nap as the little brown mosquitoes persistently buzzed and bit me into snatches of wakefulness. The stubble of our beards and our haggard eyes were beginning to show that we had been on a hunt—a hunt which at that time was less than half-way ended.

As the heat diminished somewhat from the peak of the afternoon and the last of the dust devils dwindled away to a puff of dirt and tumbleweeds on the horizon, we stood up ready to go. One by one we cooled off the hounds again in the water hole. This time they actually seemed ready to start on the track. We mounted stiffly and were off.

It was slow going at best. We could walk our horses and every few minutes we would stand and wait while the dogs slowly worked out some kink in the trail. To our amazement, the big prints of the meandering jaguar ran straight out into the valley. We had expected him to skirt the protective trees and rocks along the foot of the mountain, but this audacious beast led us straight away into fields and flats where there was scarcely enough cover for a jackrabbit. As we rode we speculated that the spotted cat must have prowled that way the night before. Even as we had walked down the moonlit washes of the mountains above, this old fellow had prowled the valley close to the habitations of men.

As the afternoon cooled into evening, the trail led under a fence and along a lane. We finally found a wire gate where we could get our horses through. Momentarily we expected the jaguar track to double back toward the protective wild rocks and mountain ridges. But on we went.

Soon we passed close to a rancher's house and as the dogs showed us the way, we saw the familiar round tracks of the big cat close

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by the man's woodpile. He stood at the back door as we passed and our cowboy friend waved a greeting. To an outsider we must have presented a very strange appearance indeed—three full grown men with a pack of hunting hounds barking through a neighbor's back yard.

But there was no time for any lengthy explanation and we passed on. We followed down the ranch lane and passed through another gate. Just before dark we came within sight of the highway that passes from Tucson to Nogales. The cars had just turned on their lights in the gathering dusk and they passed by all unknowing that three men hunted a jaguar not a hundred yards from the ditch at the side of the road.

Only then did the leopard cat turn south. Perhaps the night before he too had seen the crawling machines of man with their bright white eyes that passed on the road. But he must have been an audacious cat indeed, or a very curious one, for we passed within yards of two other houses before that night was through. We smiled as we talked among ourselves about the good ranchers in this valley. If certain of them had looked at the right place at the right time in the brilliant moonlight of the night before, they would have seen something that they could tell their grandchildren about.

We momentarily shuddered as we thought of the thing ourselves—a heavily-muscled hunting cat that would outweigh a man by a hundred pounds. In that brilliant moonlight the yellow and black of his spectacular hide would look like a nightmare, and if that didn't, his green jaguar eyes certainly would. It was only by chance that the legend of some demon of hell did not get started in the Tabac Valley on that occasion.

As the night wore on we gradually swung south and away from the highway and its fringe of ranches. It was about midnight, I believe, that we lost sight of the last flickering, coal oil lamp in some dirty window far to our right. As we again entered the foothills of the mountains, I think that I slept in the saddle. I certainly have very little recollection of the last part of the journey.

When I woke with a start, my face had been roughly rasped by a live oak tree. The moon, which had risen late, was almost full again. The Patagonia Mountains were again a sea of white splendor ornamented with patches of dark verdure here and there

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against the light-colored rocks. It seemed minutes before a hound barked ahead. It was a hoarse croaking bark. So Old Jim was still on the trail. Two or three of the younger hounds followed close to my horse's legs. They had given up the chase.

At that particular moment it seemed like a splended idea. Of my companions, there was only one and for some time I couldn't even be sure which one it was. I was so sleepy and tired of the saddle that it didn't seem to make any particular difference. I didn't even feel hungry any more, although we had eaten no real meal since the morning before. Only occasionally did Old Jim bark ahead to show that one, at least, of the party was still following a certain jaguar that prowled on moonlight nights.

I think I slept again in the saddle, for the dawn came quickly. It was the second rose-and-yellow-hued sun that we had seen climb out of the eastern sky on this interminable hunt. I saw with the increasing light that I rode just ahead of the cowboy that had joined us the day before. He looked distinctly less enthusiastic about hunting than he had been previously.

There was a shout behind and I turned around to see my hunting companion coming up with two extra horses and our own saddles. We had passed, during the last stages of the night, not too far from our old camp. Apparently he had split off to get us some fresh mounts and also some food. Judging by his smiling countenance and his generally cheerful behavior, I had more than a suspicion that my old friend had refreshed himself with a bottle of tequila.

We slid stiffly off of our horses and prepared to make coffee in a tin can. I have never seen it in any of the advertisements, but I can vouch for the fact that there is nothing that so pulls a man's soul together as a cup of good black coffee brewed in an old tin can. After the second cup, the future again seemed to hold promise. My companions seemed interesting and I actually toyed with the idea of catching that jaguar that had eluded us so long. I only felt sorry for the dogs that had no kind of stimulant such as this. But we did have something for them which they liked just as well—strips of dried horse-meat which they gulped down eagerly. There was bread and jam for us and even an apple.

With the feeling of returning life in our limbs and the renewed sense of well-being, came again the desire to hunt. There is noth-

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ing quite so stimulating as an unfinished hunt. We talked around our little camp fire of the long loop that our jaguar friend had taken down into the valley. Many times he had passed close to cattle, horses, pigs and even chickens but had never so much as deviated a yard from his course to attack any of these living things. He probably could have killed even a succulent human if he had desired. The powerful frame that had made those tracks would have found little difficulty in executing such a deadly errand.

But our tiger friend had done none of these things. He had simply taken a long trip down into the valley peopled by men and now was headed back into the mountains and south toward Old Mexico. In all that way he had made no kill nor had eaten so far as we knew. Soon he would have to. That would be the time.

We said goodbye to our cowpuncher friend as he led his horse back toward his cow camp and his neglected duties. We climbed into our own saddles with almost the freshness of the start of a new hunt. I say almost, for there was a raw spot here and there; an embedded cactus needle itched damnably in the back of my thigh; and my feet felt tired, even in the stirrups. The dogs had had no water since the day before and the salt meat made them thirstier than ever. We could not go too far but we might be able to go far enough to see a yellow and black spotted form on top of a rock. I eased the rifle in its boot under my leg at the thought. We humans are killers by nature.

Just before noon we found a pothole full of stagnant stinking water. It helped a little. In the early afternoon we crossed the boundary of the United States and Mexico. This important line was a three-wire barbed fence at this place—a very dilapidated fence indeed. The dogs had already passed under the wire and were continuing on ahead down a rocky hogback that faded into the hills of Mexico. The hounds seemed to have little feeling of the importance of the line they had crossed. We did.

"Mighty serious business, this going into Sonora," my friend told me as we sat our horses. "They have fellas that ride along this here line that are mighty tough hombres. Call 'em line riders they do, and they don't get no pay, but the stuff they pick up. If they catch cattle on their side of the line, that's theirs. I've known of a time or two when the line fellas picked up a few cattle that wasn't quite on their side of the line. They'll take our horses and

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that pretty saddle of yours," he said glancing beneath where I sat, fidgeting rather uncomfortably.

"But the jaguar," I said pointing half-heartedly toward the dogs, still visible in the distance.

"Have you ever seen the inside of one of those jails down there?" he answered. "There's lice and cockroaches and tarantuliers and bad company. Mexico is no place to get caught, illegal-like."

"But the jaguar," I said again. "We'll never get another chance, and we've followed him so far already."

"Damn the jaguar. Some of those hounds are worth more than \$500 apiece."

There was no argument against this type of logic. The three-wire fence looked so dilapidated and ineffectual, but its implications stopped us as rigidly as a 10-foot wall. A feeling of futility and fatigue came over me all at once. "All right, all right," I said wearily. "Let's quit it."

"You want to quit, eh?"

"Didn't you?" I snapped angrily, with all the testiness of one who has been wearied beyond his endurance.

"Hell no," said my companion, with one of his rare grins. "I just wanted to tell you what we were heading for." He had already dismounted and was trampling the sagging wires of the fence into the ground to lead his horse across. In another moment the hoofs of our mounts were treading the soil of ancient Mexico.

We felt an exhilaration, even in the hot air of that May afternoon. They say that even the dogs bark differently in Old Mexico. My companion chatted amiably. He usually had a gruff manner. I gathered from the scraps and fragments of stories which recalled each other to his mind in rapid succession, that this was not his first illegal foray into Old Mexico.

We jogged over the stony ground and soon caught up with the dogs. Now that the jaguar had returned to his native country, he would soon go to ground. Before the sun had set that evening there would be a beautiful mottled cat skin hanging across my saddle. Our spirits had never been higher, nor our hopes brighter.

Suddenly in the middle of a sentence my companion reined in his horse so quickly that the poor animal pranced and arched his

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head against the rough bit. My friend turned, quartering in his saddle, and looked behind, back toward the national boundary that we had crossed so jauntily a short while before. I looked too and could see nothing. No, not nothing, but four dark specks that might be cows evenly spaced directly behind us.

Even as I turned my horse I could tell that they were not cows. The dark outlines of the objects were too pointed on top and they rose and fell ever so slightly in an even rhythm like a galloping horse. That was it. They were mounted men. As their silhouettes did not change in the dancing heat waves, they were either coming directly toward us or going directly away. It couldn't be away from us.

"Line riders!" I thought or said, I do not remember which. I glanced at my friend who was still looking at the four advancing figures with a grimness that told me all too clearly that my diagnosis was probably correct.

"They're figuring on cutting us off if we try to slant back toward the line," he was saying. "Four of 'em," he mused as though weighing the odds, "and I'll bet I know just who those birds are. Come on, Frank." He jerked his horse around and we called and whistled to the dogs as we did so.

The low line of hills which we had been following since leaving the national boundary had descended into a series of rounded knolls marked here and there with projecting ledges and tongues of bare rock. There was scarcely any vegetation and no trees at all. It looked as if we were trapped without any hope of escape. It seemed as though the line riders had figured the same way for they appeared to be jogging their horses and were fanning out wider to take advantage of any deviation that we might make.

Frankly, I was scared and I mentally checked over our previous conversation to determine whether it had been I or my companion that had precipitated us into this folly. The dogs we easily called from the track. The urgency of our voices seemed more insistent to them, I suppose, than the smell of the jaguar which they had followed so long. As we gathered the hounds around the legs of our horses, some of them lay down, panting in the heat.

We were now in full view of the riders on the top of one of those bare round hills that offered no protection whatsoever. The

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four had evidently struck our trail where we had crossed the miserable wire fence and had ridden straight down upon us. Chances are, their horses were fresher than ours and certainly they had no dog pack to impede their progress.

They were still a thousand yards away, or perhaps more, when we heard a shot. Just the distant clap of the sound as it echoed in the hills and the vague whistle of the bullet overhead. It was a warning. My hunting companion spurred his horse forward diagonally toward the oncoming riders. His intention was clear. We would try to angle back toward the national boundary and perhaps we might beat our pursuers to the sheltering protection of that barbed wire fence.

But how could we? All they had to do was to cut across in front of us and they could easily intercept our course wherever it might be. On foot or on horseback, we didn't seem to have a chance.

But my friend rode like a man demented and spurred his tired horse into a full gallop over the rough ground. I followed as best I could with the hounds trailing out behind. It was obvious that we were going to make a gallant attempt to angle back through the hills to the U.S.A. side of that line. Our intent was as obvious to our pursuers. I could see them quite clearly out of the corner of my eye as I eased the jolting of the saddle with one hand on the horn. Already they had swerved on an interception course. They would cut across and catch us as we came out from behind the next hill. I even imagined that the riders were close enough so that I could tell that they all wore black sombreros and little bits of metal on their belts or bridles gleamed in the afternoon sun.

As we charged headlong down the slope and around that rocky hill it seemed to me we were merely hastening the inevitable. As we reached the bottom of the gully, out of sight of the four riders for a moment, I was certain of it. Among the rocks of this wash my friend had stopped for a second and was softly calling the dogs around him. "This way," he said with no further word of explanation and turned off at right angles to our precipitous course.

For the first time there was some stirring of hope that we might get out of this mess. At all events we weren't going to ride hell-for-leather back towards the national boundary only to be caught

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and shot at when we were half way there. With the round bulk of the hill between ourselves and the line riders we now struck a course directly south into the heart of Old Mexico. The stratagem would certainly gain us a mile or two before the riders found out what we had done. I grinned at my companion in anticipation and to show my appreciation of his quick thinking. He looked dourly at me in return. It would be three more hours before sunset.

We rode at a high trot, calling constantly to the dogs to keep them with us. Even at that they showed an increasing tendency to lag behind. With the smell of the jaguar abandoned they would all have laid in the first shade that we passed and rested the pads of their feet, worn thin in the long chase. But we urged them on and our horses and ourselves. Straight south, farther and farther away from the protecting fence that marked the boundary and safety. We threaded the rocky gulches in between the round hills and I noticed more than once that we purposely passed over rough ground where trailing would be difficult. We kept away from skyline silhouettes where we might be seen from a distance and rode ever deeper into the hills of Old Mexico.

The evening twilight was a grateful thing and the full darkness of night was like a blessed blanket. I realized after a long while that I had been unconsciously holding my head down and my neck tensed as though expecting a bullet in the back all that ride. It was scarcely dark before we saw winking lights ahead, several of them. My friend beside me seemed not at all disturbed by these evidences of habitation and rode steadily on. In another half hour we entered the straggling adobe outskirts of a small Mexican village. I found out later that this was Cananeita. A nondescript little town sprawled around what had once been a very large and, I presume, a very wealthy mine. With our dogs at our heels we jogged straight up the broad dirt path that did for a road from that direction.

There was a buzz and stir about the place that seemed unusual. I was uneasy about this. I thought perhaps the word of our unwarranted invasion of Old Mexico had somehow gone before us. But still my friend showed no sign of any alarm. We turned off through a dark alley and drew up before the ocotillo fence of a one-story adobe house that looked like all the rest in the darkness.

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A coal oil lamp shone through one window and I could see the vague shadows of people moving around in the yard. They were people in white cotton clothes with a suggestion of color here and there. My friend called out in a questioning tone: "Miguel?" and the answer came back immediately, "Sí, quién está?" We climbed from our horses and entered the little bare yard.

There was a flood of Spanish as our host recognized my hunting companion as an old friend. It is good to have friends at the right places, especially in Old Mexico. The hounds were sniffing suspiciously at the other Mexican people that crowded around us. I grasped and shook someone's hand whom I could see but indistinctly. The door of the little house opened and a flood of yellow lamp light momentarily illuminated the little yard. I suddenly felt tired, more tired than I had ever been in my whole life before, that I remembered.

We were ushered into the low-ceilinged room with its bare, dirt floor. Everyone was talking in Spanish which I gathered, from my sporadic knowledge, was a rough outline of the events of the last two days. All of the people showed interest at the word "tigre," although at that particular moment I myself wished we had never heard of the word. As we talked they brought fried beans and tortillas and set them before us. There was a kindly woman with a big bosom and bare feet that took especial care of me. There was a shy girl with a red scarf around her head who brought dishes of food and a cracked white cup full of delicious water. The meal was served with all of the courteous decorum of a banquet, and it tasted as such.

The rest of the night we slept with our dogs in a cow shed behind the little adobe house. The floor was covered with corn husks that rustled when we moved, but we moved very little. The dogs, too, were curled up in their places, or slept sprawling on their sides with scarcely a twitch to show that they lived at all.

We woke at about noon the next day to get better acquainted with our hosts and to find out that there was a fiesta in the village. The stir and bustle that we had heard the night before was the preparation for the celebration in honor of the patron saint of the place. After lunch I actually shaved in cold water and took in some of the sights of the fiesta. It was a homey and interesting affair, simple and unsophisticated, but at the same time, charm-

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ing and unspoiled. No one seemed to ask us our business, although the whole town must have known that we were there, and why. I believe I mentioned before that it is good to have friends in Old Mexico.

That night we ate another supper of beans and tortillas with some excellent cheese brought out especially for this fiesta occasion. Our host, Miguel, was dressed in his cleanest white suit, furbished at his broad middle, with a blue sash. The señora Rosa, his wife, had a black blouse of some sheeny stuff and shiny black shoes in which she walked with obvious discomfort. That evening the fiesta of San Pedro was to reach its climax in a dance on the little platform in the center of the plaza. It was a good time for us to leave, in the midst of the bustle and the comings and goings of the populace. The dogs were fairly well rested and our horses had been fed and taken care of as well as ourselves.

With a warm handshake for Miguel and murmured words of inadequate thanks for the señora and her shy daughter, we rode once again into the night, this time northward. We slanted far to the west so as to avoid any chance encounter with our line-rider friends. Most of the night was moonless and the hunt which we had started in brilliant white light and expectation, ended ignominiously in starlit darkness and dejection. My hunting friend seemed to be as sure of himself in this obscurity as he was in moonlit brilliance. We jogged north through the same hilly type of country and came upon the fence some time after midnight. There was no particular feeling of elation as we stepped over it onto United States soil. It simply marked the end of a jaguar hunt without the jaguar.

In later years, on other forays into Old Mexico, I did have the opportunity to follow and in some cases to be in at the kill of these leopard-spotted cats, but none of these hunts ever were as long, nor in any way as exciting as that of the moonlight jaguar which we never saw.

CHAPTER XI

BOBCATS IN THE SNOW

THERE are other cats besides lions and jaguars in these American woods. As a matter of fact, the most numerous of our American cats is also the smallest. This is our friend the bobcat or wild cat.

These little fellows have received perhaps less notoriety than their larger relatives, the mountain lions, but at the same time have earned a justifiable reputation for ferocity and fiery temper which has made their name synonymous with viciousness. The spotted bobcat too has managed to maintain himself better than the cougar. Perhaps his small size and furtive habits have made it easier for him to slip into the gaps between the walls of encroaching civilization. The wild bobcat still slinks through the woods of Pennsylvania and the forests and swamps of the Carolinas.

But it is in the western mountains where the bobcat really holds his own. Here they are still found in numbers and are reckoned by the stockmen and the sportsmen one of the major predators. It is in these same western mountains where we had followed the mountain lions on so many occasions that we deviated at times from our habitual routines to follow the little spotted cats with the bobbed-off tails.

Actually the trailing of bobcats with dogs is doing it the hard way. In contrast to the mountain lion, who can seldom be trapped, the spotted bobcat will investigate one of the lethal snares that

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professional trappers know how to concoct. The mountain lion, to his credit, will seldom if ever deviate from his chosen course to investigate a smell or bait of any kind. But many thousands of bobcats have been lured to their deaths in the steel jaws of traps by this means.

This is not to say, however, that bobcats cannot be caught with a dog pack. They can, and it is a very exciting business indeed. Our mountain lion hunts were studded not infrequently with these bobcat episodes. In some cases it required all of our skill and a considerable modicum of luck to score on the short-tailed little cats. These rascals have a few tricks that even the cougar does not know.

It was on one of these occasions when Homer Pickens and I were hunting the snows of the Mogollon Mountains in the early spring. It was another one of those days when we marveled at how cold these southern latitudes could be. It was a wet day; as wet and unpleasantly damp as a March snowstorm in a New Jersey swamp. Great clumps of sticky snow slid occasionally from the bending pine limbs and slopped with spattered patterns on the white carpet beneath. The sky was leaden gray, close above the tops of the dark trees. Even in mid-morning there seemed little light and the atmosphere was wet and oppressive.

A man's spirits are low when the dark forces of nature weigh him down. We had found no track that morning, although we had made a circle of four or five miles. This constituted a prodigious effort as our horses kicked with difficulty against the wet drifts of snow beneath the trees. The sticky white stuff balled up on their feet so that they walked on stilts of packed snow which would suddenly give way to the side as the poor animals put their weight upon them. We were wrenched from side to side in the saddle in the uncertain footing, and the soggy snow from the tree branches slid down our necks and caught in irritating little wet piles in the back of our saddles. Even the prospect of a miserable wet camp seemed inviting in this leaden atmosphere. It would certainly snow again that night.

"There's some bobcat tracks, Frank," Homer said ahead of me as he slapped his hat against the leg of his chaps to dislodge the snow.

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I didn't see them at first. I had my head bent down to keep from getting more snow in my collar. There was the track where a squirrel had hopped from the base of one tree to another. There was a place too where this same animal had dropped dark pieces of pine cone on the white surface.

And sure enough there were the round, evenly-marked tracks of a bobcat that had skirted the bole of a tree, possibly stalking this same squirrel. Each impression in the wet snow was the perfect miniature imprint of a lion's foot. The cat features of the bobcat's pads are as distinctive and typical as any of the other cat tribe. The size of the round prints were about the diameter of a fifty cent piece. This was a grown animal and the tracks were fresh. They had to be fresh in that melting snow.

"What do you say, Frank?" Homer looked at me sideways to keep from hitting a snow-laden limb above his head.

I shrugged my shoulders vigorously and from somewhere above me, another cascade of snow plopped down in wet blobs all over me. I groaned. Homer laughed outright at my visible discomfiture.

"Sure, a bobcat is better than nothing," I said with as much spirit as I could muster. My knees were wet through my chaps and it was difficult to enthuse over anything.

Even the dogs seemed dispirited. They sniffed at the bobcat tracks beneath the feet of our horses, but with no especial interest. There were two of our dogs who would not follow bobcats at all, but the others would if we encouraged them a little.

Homer slid off the saddle and sank deep into the snow so that his trailing chaps made double tracks behind his own. He followed the bobcat imprints beyond where they circled the great tree and led off straight to a thicket of young growth.

"Here he goes, boys. Here he goes, this way," and he swept with his arm close above the imprints of the cat's tracks. Two or three of the hounds looked up and waddled through the snow poking their noses up to their eyes in the little round prints where the cat had stepped. Sure enough, there was smell in those dents in the snow. The dogs looked at Homer again with an expression of "well-if-you-say-so." There was a short bark. Then two or three all at once, and they were off.

It seemed a synthetic hunt, the way we had purposely urged

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the dogs to take a bobcat track. These many months that we had devoted to lions exclusively, had spoiled us for such small fry as a meandering bobcat. Most of the time we actually called our dogs off of a wildcat track. But the cry of the hounds sounds the same on one variety of cat track as on another. In a few moments the dogs warmed to their task and even the laggards and puppies managed an occasional semi-enthusiastic squeal. We urged our horses after them through the thick trees with somewhat less attention paid to the wet snow that we absorbed on our persons in the process. It wasn't, as Homer once wryly observed, particularly unpleasant to get wet snow down the back of your pants, it was only warming up the stuff that was difficult.

We had gone but a few hundred yards when it developed that the track was fresh, very fresh indeed. The dogs now ran in a thick bunch, apparently the slowest nose among them could smell the hot cat odor that radiated up from the snow. In a few moments, in a small space which the dogs had not completely trampled, we saw that the cat was running. The imprints were wider apart and separated, and the front and back paws were not so carefully placed as when the animal meandered at his own chosen pace through the woods. In a few moments it would be over.

We actually saw the bobcat scale the tree beyond the dogs. There was a flash of gray fur ahead of the bouncing tails of the hounds. The gray thing acted like a splash of wet paint that threw itself against the dark bark of a pine tree for a moment and spread out. The first leap had carried the cat some eight or ten feet above the heads of the wildly-excited hounds. But the gray patch on the tree did not wait until some ecstatically jumping dog could reach that high. With hitching motions of his paws he quickly pulled himself up the trunk and onto the first big limb, safe and high above. I had seen a hundred alley cats, fleeing for their lives before the mongrels of the city, climb a hundred different trees and telephone poles in exactly the same way and with identical motions. Cats are much the same, no matter what their background might be.

We jogged up among the dogs and sat our horses to view the captive. He had a wise little face with extraordinary long whiskers on both sides of his muzzle. His ears stood straight up and

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were cocked forward to catch any sound that came from us. On each ear there was a jaunty tuft of dark colored hairs that rose to a point. It gave the cat a dressed-up appearance like a European soldier on parade with a cockade in his hat. For the rest of his appearance the bobcat is ordinary enough.

This one had a gray, buff body, typical of his kind, with dark spots that tipped in his thick winter fur as he moved uneasily on the branch. His paws were big for his size and even at that distance we could see his curved claws that bit into the bark on the sides of the limb to keep him firm. The forearms of the cat were muscular and his hindquarters gave promise of a springing power and perhaps a raking offense that would cut the opposition to ribbons. This cat, like others we had seen, although afraid, looked straight at us and growled with a ferocity that caused some apprehension even at that distance.

Every time a dog made a particularly high jump up the side of the tree, the cat turned for a moment and spit in the direction of the leaping animal. It was an explosive hissing noise accompanied by a strike of the forepaw with the claws raking off bits of bark with the fury of the movement. The jumping dog in each case was several yards from making contact with the bobcat above, but the ferocious little animal was simply indicating to the hound what would happen if he did come closer.

But mostly the bobcat seemed to recognize in us his principal enemies, a very astute deduction. Mountain lions, when they are treed, seem to pay little attention to their human adversaries and spit and strike at the dogs. The bobcats have a justifiable reputation for attacking humans if they are backed into a corner. Many a hunter—and Homer among them—had told me that they would climb into a tree with a mountain lion, but never a bobcat. It did seem silly, though, for a human with his gloves, and his gun, to be afraid of entering the same tree with an animal that might weigh thirty or forty pounds. But this particular bobcat shifted and paced on the big pine limb above us, and spit and growled at the dogs below and at ourselves with equal ferocity.

"Frosty little rascal, isn't he?" Homer commented. We picked up a few sticks and threw them in the direction of the cat. When they came close to him, he would bat them away with lightning

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blows of his forepaws. Once he rose on both hind feet to strike with his two forepaws together. The animal had an amazing agility and balance. It was obvious that the bobcat was very much at home in a tree.

But humans do not play with their victims as cats do with theirs—or do they? Homer slipped his short-barreled carbine out of his saddle boot and stepped off of his horse. I led the animals to one side so that the muzzle blast would not cause them to shy. I always felt on these occasions like a detached newspaper man watching the firing squad execution of a criminal whose guilt was not quite certain.

The big bullet from Homer's .30-30 bit through the body of the little animal on the limb and carried the cat half way from the tree with the impact. In a brief fragment of time that mottled gray ball of defiant ferocity was rendered by the bullet into a limp and somewhat bloody mess of formless fur. The dogs milled around the depression in the snow where the cat had fallen. They chewed and pulled with evident canine satisfaction on the mangled form of the little cat. It seemed to me at the time that the contest would have been far more interesting if the bobcat had had the use of some of his feline facilities for fighting back. There would have been many a scratched and bloody nose in that dog crew if he had.

We pulled the bobcat from among the dogs before the skin should be ruined entirely. The cat was a male and a beautiful animal, not counting the bloody patches and the saliva-matted fur where the hounds had mouthed him. We tied him behind my saddle and swung up again on to our horses. The death of the forest bobcat had been but an incident on a dark winter's day.

But we were not done with bobcats in that Mogollon snow. We had not traveled a half a mile until Homer, who rode ahead, pulled up his horse and pointed to the ground on his left. It was another set of bobcat tracks, and as fresh as the first.

"Well, here we go again," I said jauntily, although the prospect of a hot cup of coffee at camp still intrigued me. The dogs, too, seemed to catch the spirit of the occasion and even before we dismounted, they were barking about us with wildly thrashing tails. "This way boys," Homer said ahead of us, and we were off after the second bobcat of that day. There is one great advantage to

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trailing in sodden snow, such as this. If you have any track at all it is bound to be a fresh one. This bobcat had, as the first one, passed beneath those trees only a short time before. The tracks looked slightly bigger than the first, but diminutive still when compared with the lion.

As before, this bobcat led us through the thickest growths of young pines and clumps of mountain mahogany bushes that grew on the slopes. It had snowed heavily the day and night previous, and these mountain cats had probably gone hungry during the storm. Now that the snow had stopped they were stalking the thickets on padded feet to pick up a succulent rabbit or unwary squirrel. This cat was obviously hunting. For the most part we circled the thickest clumps of bushes and young trees, letting the dogs actually follow the tracks through the low-arched forest runways of the smaller animals. Perhaps this particular bobcat finally made a kill and satiated his cat hunger in some spot of blood and tufts of fur and feathers among the bushes. Or perhaps with typical bobcat perception, he suddenly realized that he was pursued by the group of barking hounds that drew ever nearer through the thickets. For suddenly these little cat tracks stopped their meandering and headed straight for the rocks.

There was a volcanic outbreak of multi-colored bluffs and pinnacles at the very head of Alum Canyon. Here the rocks vied with each other in a welter of reds and yellows and blacks, dikes and faults that would delight a geologist or a miner with its possibilities. But the soft and hard places of these many tumbled cliffs and ledges had produced a welter of clefts and cracks and semi-holes that showed dark before us, contrasted with the white of the snow on top. There was no doubt that this bobcat was a familiar character in that rocky maze.

He headed straight for the whole geological mess and dropped with confidence down a little slanting crack that followed the strike of a quartz vein directly into a jumble of tumbled rock fragments. The dogs followed eagerly and in a matter of moments were separated and confused. One venerable hound—Old Chief as I recall—somehow got out on a ledge higher than the rest and barked dismally. It was not a bark of a trailing dog; it was the yapping of any canine that is in trouble. Two more dogs circled and slipped over the pile of rock fragments, seemingly at a loss

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as to where a red-hot bobcat could go so quickly and so completely. Another dog sniffed tentatively at several of the dark holes and cracks that opened here and there in the cliffside.

There was an old prospector's pit with its little hill of snow-covered talus out in front. This too the hounds investigated and rejected. That particular bobcat had simply skittered into the midst of a rocky paradise of cracks and clefts to vanish like a wraith. This was no new bobcat trick. Rocks and cliffs and bobcat hunts go together like liver and bacon. It looked like a stalemate and what had promised to be a double-barreled bobcat day, was to end up as a dud.

But wait a minute! There was one bark in all that maelstrom of hound noise that sounded like a dog looking at the enemy. It was Buck and he was barking "Treed!" right among the other dogs. Even a few yards away the hound's voice was muffled and it echoed among the rocks with a cavernous roar. There was Buck, or rather the rear end of him, protruding out from the triangular hole left where a gigantic rock fragment had fallen from the cliff and then leaned against it, leaving a narrow space behind. Buck's short tail cocked viciously at every bark. His sides heaved with the effort of the roar he was making and two knots on his ribs, which a lion had broken years before, moved up and down with his tail.

There was no doubt that Buck was face to face with the cat. Even as we scrambled down over the rocks to get closer to the excitement, Buck suddenly backed out of the hole as though some invisible force had given him a push. I had no doubt but that the force was the raking claw of the bobcat, discouraging Buck from any closer acquaintance. The other dogs were around the hole now and drank in satisfying whiffs of the cat odor that came out of the crack. One hound repeatedly climbed on the slanting rock above the entrapped bobcat and as repeatedly slid off, taking the wet snow with him. But each time there was a joyful dog squeal of delight and more barks.

Homer and I climbed down among the dogs, slipping on the snow-covered rocks beneath our feet. By now the soggy snow that had covered the rock pile had been beaten into a welter of hound tracks and black marks where their bodies had slid or rolled over. In slight gaps in the din and confusion we could hear the

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spitting of the bobcat in the cleft. The little fellow had chosen his retreat well. There was no possible way to get at him except the one entrance in the rocks into which two of the dogs now thrust their heads. As he leaped and raked at them with his claws, they would start back, then edge forward again, barking furiously. It was obviously great fun. Again I was reminded of alley cats and the felines of the streets of the city. I had seen unfortunate pussies before brought to bay under someone's back porch in just this same position.

But there is an end to all things, and the end of this spotted bobcat was near. I had the difficult job of dragging the hounds away from the mouth of the cleft and at the same time keeping out of the path of any ricochetting bullet. The moment that I dragged two hounds away, a couple of others took their places. I finally ended up in a crack between two slanting rocks where I had ingloriously slid, grasping three hounds with my hands and with two others under my legs. By this time I had hound prints all over me and a very generous amount of wet slush inside of my clothes in many cool and uncomfortable places. I have a great respect for hound power under these circumstances. Three heavy lion hounds can drag a man along, practically at will.

It helped a little that occasionally one of my hounds took time out from his barking to lick my face with a lavish tongue, as though to assure me that he was not trampling me through any lack of friendship. It was just the excitement. And of excitement there was plenty. Every wild creature for miles around in the Mogollon woods must have known that Homer Pickens and his dogs had brought a bobcat to bay in one of the clefts of rock in Alum Canyon.

Homer himself, the lord and master of all of this noise, knelt carefully some distance away from the mouth of the hole. "For Gawd's sake, Homer, hurry!" I yelled desperately, as one of the hounds wrenched viciously against his collar. The sudden pull sideways brought my head in violent contact with a none-too-soft rock. There was a blaze of light and I'm afraid I cursed viciously and pulled the struggling dog over on top of me. But Homer was having difficulties in getting his sights on the blurred form of the bobcat crouched in the rear of the crevice. These difficulties I did not particularly appreciate at the moment, as there was snow

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in my eyes and one of the hounds that I held by the collar was sitting on my stomach, barking.

The blast of Homer's rifle was a relief to me, but the end of another spotted cat. A second quick shot before the dogs could get there again, made certain that the animal was dead. Homer, holding back the rush of dogs with his own body, prodded the form of the cat tentatively with his rifle barrel. It would be, as he expressed it, a very uncomfortable business to have one of those spotted babies jump out in your face. But there was no jump left in that particular bobcat. We dragged him out on the rocks and the dogs seized on him as they had his predecessor, to pull and chew for a moment and vent their satisfaction in mouthings and growlings over his dead form.

It was still early afternoon when we tied the body of the second bobcat behind Homer's saddle and started for camp. It had been a very satisfying day. It is not often that two wily bobcats can be taken in a single hunt. Many more of these little rascals escape in rocks and cliffs and brushy thickets than the larger cats. There are some good trailing dogs that cannot catch a bobcat at all.

We slanted across the ridge toward our camp at the head of Copperas Canyon. The sky seemed an even more imminent threat of snow before evening. Our horses were tired and so were we. But it had been a successful day, at least for one that had started out so inauspiciously. The dogs trailed behind us, taking advantage of the rough path that our two horses kicked in the snow.

"Holy smokes, Homer!" I found myself saying. "There's another bobcat track!" There was no doubt about this one either. Another bobcat had crossed our trail at right angles and was headed off up the ridge. One of the dogs had turned aside and was already investigating the track by plunging his nose into the imprints.

"Well, we might as well," Homer said slowly. "The dad-blamed cat is going almost our way anyhow." The dogs were tired too, but they entered on this third bobcat track with considerable enthusiasm nonetheless. We did not even have to dismount to encourage them. They were off, up the slope, bounding in arching strides to get through the snow.

The track seemed more melted out than the first ones we had followed. This was small wonder as the snow had been melting

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all afternoon and was still wet to the touch. But the trail had to be fresh—probably that morning. Three bobcats in a day was going to be a record of some sort. As before, we jogged along easily keeping up with our dogs. It took some urging to persuade our horses to breast the slope as the poor animals undoubtedly had envisioned themselves by this time with their noses buried in a delicious sack of oats back at camp.

“Every bobcat on the mountain must be out today,” I proffered by way of unnecessary conversation. I turned momentarily in the saddle to pat with my gloved hand the stiffened form of the spotted cat behind me. Maybe we would get three. Trailing conditions were still ideal. This was going to be a bobcat day.

As before, the cat had circled and slanted through every thick clump of brush and every low-hanging thicket on the slope. This was where the small animals might be found—the legitimate game of the wild cat. Rabbits were to these pussies as deer were to the mountain lion. But as far as we could see our tufted-eared friend ahead was unsuccessful and made no kill. If he continued to meander in the comparatively open woods, his death was practically certain, with those veteran hounds behind him.

But the bobcat trail, in spite of its uncertainties and seemingly aimless changes of direction, was heading inevitably up and across the ridge. On the far side of that hog back, Homer and I knew very well that there was another one of those spectacular series of cliffs and rock ledges that made hunting in the Mogollons so interesting. It had been in this particular “rock garden”—as Homer was pleased to call it—that we had lost a lion only a month before.

“Cripes! If he gets in that jumble of rock, he’s a safe cat,” Homer said as though reading my own thoughts.

We urged our horses to greater efforts as though by our own speed we could somehow push on the dogs from behind to overtake the quarry. We were just at that moment rounding out on the very top of the ridge and could see, among the trees on the far side, the first rocky pinnacle or two of the whole series that dropped off in cascading ledges to the Gila River below. Scattering flakes of snow of the promised storm drifted gently out of the gray sky, so close above us. There was a suggestion of darkness in the air, although it was still midafternoon.

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It would not take many of those lazy, floating snow flakes to fill the round cat tracks, even if the fleeing animal did not make the safety of the rocks. Perhaps it would be better to leave the day at two bobcats and stop this Mogollon foolishness. Even as I was suggesting the thought, there was a burst of sound ahead and the younger dogs who had been lagging, bounded into renewed action.

"They've jumped him, come on!" I brought the quirt down on the rump of my already laboring horse with vicious disregard for the deep snow and the fatigue of the poor beast. He responded nobly as he always did. That horse had spent practically his whole life on the lion chase. He knew as well as I did what the meaning of the sudden burst of hound voices might be. I swung to one side of the saddle horn and clung close to the damp neck of my mount to avoid the thrashing limbs above me. With one hand I jammed my hat more firmly on my head and with the other reached below my leg to make certain the rifle was still in its scabbard. We had gone but a few yards when a frozen pad of snow, flung from the hind foot of Homer's horse ahead, struck me with a stunning impact squarely between the eyes.

I hung limp for a moment and shook my head like a prize-fighter staggered by a blow. The thought flashed through my mind that there must be an easier way to indulge the sporting instincts than this. But there was the cry of the hounds, now drawing away rapidly. Homer's horse was an indistinct blur among the trees. I had unconsciously—in saving myself from falling—pulled the reins of my own horse to one side.

"Hell!" I thought, "I'll be out of the hunt." I wiped a trickle of blood from my forehead with the snow on my sleeve and jerked my horse back into the tracks left by Homer and the hounds. Again there was that reckless feeling of wild abandon as I urged my horse along without any particular guiding hand to see where he went. I fairly collided with Homer's horse on the very brink of the slope as I slid to a stop. Homer was already out of the saddle and down below us at the edge of the rocks.

So the cat had gotten to the rocks after all, I thought, as I stiffly swung out of the saddle and sat down in the snow. I had clumsily hooked a spur in the dead bobcat behind. I stamped down to where Homer and the dogs were racing back and forth

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frantically at the very edge of the first cliff. Here the even carpet of the wooded slope ended abruptly in a sheer cliff that dropped perhaps a hundred feet to the rock breaks and other cliffs below.

"We've trailed him right to the edge of this contemptible cliff," Homer was saying. "He must be a flying cat to get out of this one." He shook his head sadly with all the indication of his long knowledge that the bobcat was a spotted furbag full of unexpected tricks. I checked the cliff edge too, although there seemed to be little to be gained by doing so. The dogs had, minutes before, tramped out any vestige of actual tracks. Indeed, I unceremoniously hauled a couple of the dogs back from the precipice by their tails.

An incautious step at the very edge of the cliff, a little overhang of the pine needle duff beneath the snow, and a lion hound would be a mangled carcass on the rough rocks below. In the edge of that smooth cliff, however, there was no crack or ledge below that might have offered purchase to a cat foot. The cliff too extended for many yards in either direction. "And we trailed him right to here," Homer kept repeating as he stood in one place. It began to look like a dead heat and another cat mystery.

I leaned over the edge of the cliff as Homer was already starting up the slope toward the horses. There was no one to retrieve me by the tail if I miscalculated the uncertain footing at the edge of the rock. My cautious survey again ascertained that the face of the rock was smooth—unusually so for the volcanic formation in those regions. No, it was not quite smooth. Jutting out from some hidden crevice below me a little pinyon tree of diminutive and pathetic proportions clung on the face of the rock.

Anyway if I did slip I might catch that thing. Its audacious roots must have found some unbelievable nutriment in a stony crack, for its top was thick and bushy as though to make up for its ludicrous position on the cliff face. It was this thought that made me look at it again with a feeling that I did not know exactly what had arrested my attention. There it was! That little pinyon tree looked peculiar. I turned to look at it again. Something round in the very thickest part of the ridiculous tree. It was something round and it blinked.

I scrambled a few yards up the slope on my hands and knees and called hoarsely: "Homer!" I waved my arms wildly and he

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turned and came down at a run. Of course, it would not do to come right out and tell Homer that I had seen an eye that blinked. I had to remark coyly: "I have something to show you, Homer, that may interest you and the dogs." I led him proudly to the cliff edge and pointed straight at the verdure of the little pinyon tree below us. I felt like Balboa pointing out the Pacific. It was the first time I had ever seen anything that Homer hadn't seen before me and one of the very few occasions when we had located something that the dogs hadn't.

Even with that close inspection, the bobcat was hard to see. He was lying at full length on the branch of the little tree, completely concealed by the bushiness of the pinyon fronds. Even staring at the trapped cat for several moments we could see nothing more than that one baleful eye and the bare outline of the side of his head. I leaned my camera over the edge of the rock and snapped a picture of a bobcat's eye in a pinyon tree. I set the focus at six feet.

But it was growing dark and there was more killing to be done. Homer knelt at the edge of the cliff, several yards to the side. Here he could approximate the best where the cat's body might be. The dogs stood around expectantly, although none of them had as yet seen the bobcat nor apparently had smelled him, although he was so close. Knowing what the hounds would do, I called them to one side along the edge of the cliff where, in a hundred yards or so, we might slide down a talus slope and get at the foot of this first precipice. Homer's shot blurted through the gathering darkness while my back was still turned. I started involuntarily and turned to see the bobcat, now fully visible in his little pinyon refuge.

The animal sat up on his haunches on the precarious footing and threw back his head as though he were going to emit a bobcat scream. But the animal made no sound, only jerked in another spasm and fell over backwards off the end of his little tree to fall in slow gyrations down, down, to the rough rocks below.

The hounds were there almost as soon as he landed. If there had been any life left in him, he would not have escaped on any account. But he was quite dead and the dogs pulled and worried his body among them on the rocks. Homer and I descended more slowly and pulled the bobcat out from among the dogs.

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This animal also was a male, the third that we had bagged that day.

"We've been just a little hard on the papa bobcats today," Homer remarked as we scrambled back up the slope. "We'd better remember this occasion, because the next three bobcats will probably get away from us entirely." They did, too, but that is another story.

CHAPTER XII

LION ON A ROPE

DID you boys ever catch a lion—alive, I mean—and tie him up? I don't mean a kitten, I mean one like this," and he poked the dead animal at our feet.

The man who spoke was a rancher named Charlie. He had an outfit in the Rincon Mountains in southern Arizona. Every one knew Charlie was pretty handy with horses and very handy with a rope. Few seemed to know his last name or to think such a knowledge necessary. He had a young, though somewhat aquiline face and a tall, narrow-hipped body. He did look capable.

Frank Colcord and I had just caught a lion on a not-too-spectacular chase on the very edge of the Rincon Mountains. Two or three men now squatted on their boot heels around the carcass where we had laid it in the shade of a live oak tree. Frank Colcord was no mean man with a rope himself and had won many a cowboy championship in the larger Arizona rodeos of past years.

"Sure," Frank answered Charlie's question. "We've tied 'em up. But they're sure hell on a rope," he added with his characteristic grin.

Charlie still looked skeptical. "Do you ride 'em down or rope 'em out of a tree?" This last he added somewhat scornfully as one duck hunter would ask another if he had shot his birds on the water.

Frank Colcord still grinned good naturedly. "You don't ride

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lions down like a calf, my friend," and then he added as though a sudden and brilliant thought had come to him. "Why don't you come and help us out and we'll tie up a lion for you as slick and neat as a package from the store?"

"I've got ten dollars that says you can't do it," one of the other men said. He turned out later to be one of Charlie's employees. In a second everyone was reaching into his shirt pocket for a green bill of folding money to place on the contest.

I introduced the only sour note in what promised to be a very lively contest. "We have to find a lion first," I mentioned by way of caution.

The other men glanced at me dourly and went on placing their bets. There was nothing to do but enter into the spirit of the occasion, although I didn't know toward which side of the controversy I leaned. Tying up a full-grown lion had certain elements of sport in it, but then the whole process of lion-hunting is sporting. Perhaps this would make it more so. Even in the hot sun of that Arizona morning I found myself growing as wildly enthusiastic as the rest. I had a rope of hard-woven maguey fibers which I had bought in Old Mexico. I took the stiff coils from my saddle and carefully made certain that there were no kinks in its length. This stout rope ought to do the trick.

Frank Colcord laughed and joked with the other cowboys as we skinned the dead lion that afternoon. As I carefully stripped the tawny hide from the muscular forearms of the beast, I could not help but speculate on the power in those sinews. A single blow of the paw, which I now held between my knees, would disembowel a full-grown man and the claws and teeth would cut like daggers into human flesh or into man's puny ropes equally. Was the rope quicker than the movement of a cat? Would a lion, when he felt a tightening noose, turn and fight?

I had seen wild horse stallions do just that, and horses are but ill-equipped for fighting when compared with a cougar. I remembered too the story of a cowboy who had roped a bear. He had thrown his noose true and caught the fleeing animal by the neck. But the bear was not a docile victim. He had climbed back along the rope, killed the man's horse and came very close to killing the man himself. The roping of a full-grown lion was going to be more than a ten-dollar affair.

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We started out on the hunt at daybreak the next morning. There always is a certain pleasing bustle and tightening of saddle girths at the start of a chase. This one had somewhat of the rodeo about it. There was an unusual amount of laughing and good-natured banter. We had company too, plenty of it. There was Swede Parker, the owner of the Bellote Ranch, and Mrs. Parker. And of course most of the cowboys that had become financially interested in the roping of a lion. I smiled to myself as I thought of some of these inexperienced people starting out so gaily. We might ride hard for a solid week before we ever came close to a lion. At that time, I was a veteran of some thirty-odd lion kills myself. I could afford to be supercilious.

But the fates that watch over feline lives willed otherwise. We had not ridden two miles from the Bellote Ranch over toward the San Pedro side when we struck a track. A lion of sizable proportions had circled along the fringe of a granite wash, apparently some time the previous night. Frank Colcord's dogs were eager and fresh, and so were we. It did seem to me that Frank got off and examined the track with unusual ostentation. He took a rather extraordinary amount of time preparing his dogs and giving them personal instructions.

Keeno and Bulger seemed to think this was as silly as I did. They knew a lion track when they smelled one and had already started upon it in the right direction. But then, Frank had an audience and I must confess that we did have to make it appear that tracking down the lion was not too easy.

We started off up the edge of the wash through the scattered live oak trees and occasional rounded granite boulders that jutted from the rolling terrain. The cowboys with us practiced as we went along by "making loops" as they expressed it. This consisted of ceaselessly lassoing small tufts of bushes that grew on the ground or encircling a particularly outstanding stone or dead branch. I must confess that I had never seen a better group of rope-men. Each time that they coiled the rope carefully for the next cast, they disentangled the luckless bush or branch at which they had thrown. These men seldom missed.

We slanted down over the increasingly sharp ridges toward the north side of the Catalina Mountains. We jogged and at times loped our horses. It was a fast track. These other fellows really

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didn't deserve to be so lucky, I thought. It was still early in the morning when we jumped the unfortunate lion that was to be the focus of our attention for some time to come. Apparently the cougar had been lying under a rocky ledge, avoiding the rising heat of the day. It was April, but already in these southern latitudes the saddle leather felt warm to the touch and the dogs were breathing heavily. The hound pack, following out above the ledge, practically jumped on top of the sleeping lion.

We actually saw the beast get up and away,—another sight, the rarity of which our cowboy friends did not fully appreciate. The sudden roar of the hounds startled the horses for a moment and one or two of the other mounts actually reared. Ahead and below us, across a little, dipping swale, we could see the long form of the tawny cat stretched out in the graceful arching bounds of a dead run. It was a thrilling sight to see the long tail of the lion airily trailing behind. In less time than it takes to describe it, the lion was across the little gully and well up on the other side, among the scattered trees. We all involuntarily spurred our horses and leaned forward in the saddles. It was the unconscious motion of the rodeo rider as his calf or steer leaves the chute.

But no calf ever made a getaway like that mountain lion. I had the satisfaction of hearing my friends on all sides whistle with amazement at the speed of the lion. It is small wonder that the cougar has the reputation of being able to cover a hundred yards in three or four seconds. As far as I know, a running lion has never actually been clocked, but I have the testimony of several ranchers from the Rincon region of southern Arizona that a running cougar is "the fastest critter they ever seen."

The group of us swarmed down over the little ledge and into the swale like the American cavalry on maneuvers. There was a scattered series of exhilarating yells and men began to loosen their ropes and dangle their loops. The quarry was in sight. Sweeping low through the stiff branches of live oaks between which we passed, we dodged and swung recklessly in our saddles. There was a split-second movement of elbows and shoulders to keep the raking twigs from gouging out an eye or tearing the cheek.

But certainly no one among us would think of pulling rein

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or slackening speed. The sight of the fleeing lion was a stimulant which overcame all hesitancy.

During the first few seconds of this mad dash, I had a slight accident. A bunch of ordinary matches which I had carelessly thrust into my jeans pocket suddenly ignited. Apparently in sawing sideways in the saddle to avoid a sweeping oak beneath which my horse had passed on the way down the slope, I had rubbed the treacherous things enough to set them aflame. The sudden heat burned through my groin with a searing pain. I humped and heaved in the saddle on top of the still-galloping horse "like a cockroach in a skillet" as Frank afterwards told me. I still carry the mark of this little incident to this day. The great lion chase of the Catalina Mountains is burned into my memory, or at least burned into some part of me.

Fortunately there was not enough oxygen inside of my blue jeans to keep the matches going, or the cowboys might have had to rope me to keep me from overtaking the lion single-handed. As it was, in my violent gyrations I had inadvertently spurred my horse more cruelly than any rodeo rider. I myself was considerably stimulated by the burn I had just received. The net result was that as we pounded across the floor of the little valley and up the far side, I was considerably and quite undeservedly in the lead of the more experienced riders of these parts. I inadvertently achieved a reputation for being a devil of a man on a horse by this accidental means. Of such accidents are reputations made.

But none of us overtook that fleeing lion. Neither Frank Colcord nor I had expected to. There was going to be no throwing of rope loops on any animal on the ground. The far slope of the little valley grew steeper toward its top and we had to slow our horses to a chopping, heaving gallop as they thrust themselves up the last of the incline. The dogs were already over and beyond in the next shallow canyon. We bunched at the top of the ridge and rode down together, more slowly now for we could hear the dogs barking "Treed!" below us.

We saw the lion sticking out of the top of a live oak before we reached the bottom of the swale. He had climbed to the very top of the tree, which was none too big at best, and his head and

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shoulders protruded through a space in the glossy, green leaves. The broad head and heavy build of the lion indicated that we had a male at bay in the tree and from the looks of him, no youngster either. The lion and the dogs, our horses and ourselves breathed heavily for the next few minutes during an enforced truce in the hostilities.

We tied the ponies off to the side, out of harm's way. Each man brought his rope from the saddle and carried it coiled and ready in his hands. Two of the cowboys started clearing branches from neighboring trees that might momentarily snag their flying loops and spoil their aim. It was obliging of the lion to protrude head and shoulders above the brittle branches of the tree. If he had merely crouched in the thickness of the limbs, we never would have had a chance. There was considerable haggling as to who was to have the first throw. It would be an up-and-over shot of considerable difficulty, but certainly not an impossibility for such men as these. It finally was decided that Swede Parker, as being the owner of the outfit, should throw first.

The first cast landed short and fouled among the branches of the tree in front of the lion. On the second try Swede threw true, high and with an arching loop that fell fair over the outstretched neck of the lion above us. With a speed born of long practice, Swede threw his weight against the rope to pull it tight. But what is the swiftness of man compared to the lightning movements of the cats? Before the loop could tighten even part way, the lion had seized the rope in his mouth and bit at it savagely, shaking his head as though to break the back of the serpentine thing that threatened to strangle him.

In a second the two ends of the rope came away free in Swede's hands. The lion had bitten the strong hemp cleanly in two as neatly as though it had been severed by a sharp knife. Swede ruefully held up his cut loop before him as though to assure himself that no lion hung there. "This hemp is doggoned hard to get these days, too," he commented.

Frank Colcord and another one of the men now decided to throw their loops together. Frank threw from in front to distract the lion's attention. The other cowboy, a fellow they called "Cartwheel," threw from the side. Surely the lion could not cut both the ropes before one tightened on his neck. Frank's

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throw was good and it held. The only difficulty was that the lion had struck with his forepaw at the descending loop of rope as it settled around him. Frank heaved back with a skillful twist of his body as the noose fell true.

However he had caught not only the neck of the lion, but one of his forepaws as well. The rope tightened like a whiplash and the powerful paw of the cougar was pulled against the side of his head and neck. The unnaturalness of the position threw him off balance and he struggled and writhed desperately, backing up on the branch of the tree as he did so. I could see Frank jerked violently from side to side and the fighting rope in his hands pulled him halfway around when he stumbled and fell, but kept hold of the rope. But where was Cartwheel's rope?

"Throw, man, throw!"

The man named Cartwheel was hastily trying to build another loop in his recalcitrant rope. A half twist in the thing seemed to baffle him. The more he frantically hurried, the worse the thing got. Apparently his loop had caught in a tree behind him as he was making the cast. The man had an agonized expression on his face of the same variety I had seen worn by fishermen who had got their line into a hopeless tangle just as the trout were rising.

But Cartwheel did throw a miserable flat loop attempt that fell to one side of the still-fighting lion. Two other men jumped to grasp the rope in Frank Colcord's hands as he was dragged along the ground. I kept my eye on the lion. The animal had backed almost to the other side of the tree on three legs. The fury of his struggle had torn branches, leaves and twigs from the top of the tree. A tuft or two of lion hair floated down with the debris. Suddenly the beast stopped as though he realized this hysteria was getting him nowhere. He paused for a brief second. A growl rumbled out of his throat—a noise as menacing and awful as one might hear in an African jungle night. I don't know whether that growl was meant for ourselves or the rope.

In the next moment the lion, quite still now, reached down to where the hondo of the lariat pressed against his shoulder. A single grinding motion of those lion jaws and the hard hemp was severed clean through. Two men below the tree went to their knees as the rope went suddenly slack. A third sprawled on his

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face as the uneven tug of war ended abruptly. The men hauled the ruined lasso out of the branches and stood together to consider the next move. With good lariats at four dollars apiece, this was going to be an expensive lion if this sort of thing kept up very long.

But the man named Cartwheel (I think his real name was Cartwright) felt angered at himself for missing his throw at the crucial moment. He needn't have felt so badly. It was an awkward situation at best and there was no room for a man to twirl his rope before making his cast. It was a case of building a loop and then throwing up above and arching out to miss the branches of the trees. But Cartwheel threw again, although by now the lion was in a more difficult position than ever.

Twice the big cat turned his head from us and crept tentatively along a brushy limb. We knew what was in the cat's mind. He could make a running leap and a quick dash over the heads of the dogs, and these man-things with their long coils of rope. Each time that the tormented lion thought of this, however, we circled wide and shook our coils of rope at him to turn him back. It was amazing how that big cat with teeth that could sever the backbone of a deer or three strands of hard hemp at a bite, should be afraid of us, or even of the dogs for that matter. That lion could out-fight us in any kind of jungle rough-and-tumble or claw-and-tooth repartee. But the cougar merely crouched in the thick tree so close above us and snarled and hissed invectives.

Cartwheel coiled and threw again and again. Whenever the rope came close to the lion he struck at it. If it fell to one side or caught in the branches above his head, he ignored it completely. On the fifth or sixth throw the rope fell over the lion's head slantwise and hung there, kept from settling into place by a tantalizing twig. With a quick flip of the wrist so characteristic of the cowman fraternity, Cartwheel sent an undulation up the taughtening length of the rope to flip the loop true and into place at its end. The lion at this same second pulled back his head and the tightening noose slipped over his ears and down over his eyes. It hung for a second, completely encircling the muzzle of the now-terrified lion. He sought for the grasping thing with his lower jaw in a sideways motion. At the same time

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he struck at both sides of his face with his forepaws to claw the rope away.

The loop could not hold in that position and it slipped free and dropped once again into the stiff live oak branches. When Cartwheel once again coiled his reata, two of the strands of the loop were cut. The frayed ends of the fibres gave ample evidence that that particular rope would never hold anything much again.

While this excitement had been taking place, we had momentarily forgotten the dogs. All of us had followed each throw of the rope with our eyes like spectators at a tennis match. Our own shouts and admonitions had almost drowned out the dogs, for the pack had barked constantly. Or else we had become so accustomed to the din, that it simply did not register. I suddenly became aware that the ground around the live oak tree had been trampled into a welter of dust that even now settled in gently floating clouds around the men and dogs. The dogs! One of the barks of our canine helpers seemed strangely close. Good heavens!

The animal was actually in the tree with the lion. It was one of the pups, a ludicrous long-eared red-colored hound with a minimum of experience in his background. What the little hound lacked in experience, however, he was making up for in enthusiasm. Obviously we humans had been trying to get at the lion in the tree. The silly hound was simply backing us up. I dare say that in his little dog mind even he had no idea how his enthusiasm could have carried him to such heights. When we first noticed the puppy after we had lost the third rope, the hound was on the second or third limb up from the ground and was barking furiously. His two hind paws were firmly set near the trunk of the tree and his forefeet were on the limb above. Perhaps we had an arboreal hound in our outfit and hadn't realized it before.

But no, even as we looked, the stance of the ludicrous dog faltered and he scrambled wildly for a purchase for his feet in this unfamiliar medium. Frank and I rushed forward beneath the tree to help him down. But too late. With his long ears trailing dolefully, he looked down a moment as we came near him. The awfulness of the ten or twelve feet of unsupported space beneath him completely wrecked his self-possession.

There was a hound squeal and a scramble, a loud "OOF!" as

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the dog hit sideways across the bottom limb, and a piercing yelp as our audacious friend struck the ground on his head. His terrifying barks of a moment ago directed toward the lion, had now turned to a typical series of squeals and yaps of a hound that is hurt. Without a second's hesitation the puppy picked himself up and dashed off through the other dogs, still screaming wildly.

Frank and I laughed together, although we felt at the same time some compassion for the ridiculous little hound. He had been all right until he had questioned his own ability. I've seen people like that too, and their fall was just as rapid. But there was another lesson in what the little lion dog had done.

"Why not climb into the tree and fit the noose over the lion?" I found myself suggesting this brave course to Frank and the other men. I think probably the main reason was that so far I had been pretty well out of the excitement. I doubted my ability to throw a rope loop over a lion sitting twenty feet above me in a brushy tree. Due to this reticence, however, I now had one of the two undamaged ropes in the company. If a wager and a reputation was to be won, it must be done quickly and with some show of skill.

I don't think any of us really cared about the bets that had been placed on this venture. Every one concerned had obviously been doing his utmost to rope the lion. It was only that when you start out to do a thing you like to finish it. Not only that, but there is a certain challenge in pitting a puny rope against the fighting strength of a full-grown lion. This is the bodily contact type of thing that you hear so much about in sport. No cowardly bullet from a distance in this deal.

I found myself much in the same position of the hound pup a few minutes before. As I had first suggested that some one climb into the tree with the lion, that some one quite naturally turned out to be me. These cowboys have a way about them of somehow forcing a person to do things against his better judgment, even without saying much about it. I remember a certain incident of a particularly vicious bucking horse which I had ridden on one awful occasion under similar circumstances. These cowmen live much by muscular effort and skill in coordinated movements. That is about all they respect in any one else.

Fortunately I had climbed into trees with lions before. I had,

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as every one, a rather low opinion of the courage of the cougar at close quarters. I had seen too many of them quail before me to be really terrified about the situation. That is, if you are on the ground and the lion is in a tree: When you are face to face with the animal, however, and looking across only four or five feet into the depths of those slitted cat eyes, you begin to wonder. Lions have killed humans before. They could easily do so again, and this one was cornered and desperate.

I tied the coil of rope loosely around my shoulder and started up into the tree.

"Have the other ropes ready, now," I called in a professional tone. "Once we get him choked down, we'll have to tie him quick."

The tree was short and stubby, but it had a maze of stiff and unyielding branches close to the trunk. It was a question of fighting my way upward with my gloved hands and at the same time keeping an eye on the lion. If he should take a notion to finish off one of his irritating enemies, I had a vision of some severed ropes I had just seen. I kept the trunk of the tree between myself and the big cat as best I could. The cougar crouched almost in the very top of the live oak, draped across two limbs with a halo of branches and glossy green leaves around him.

If I could only get above the beast, it would be much easier. But there was no opportunity for that. I carefully and meticulously wormed my way up through the stiff branches on the other side of the tree. Of necessity, I had to keep fairly close to the trunk so that the limbs would support my weight. This brought me within six or seven feet of the terrified animal as I slowly pulled myself level with the topmost branch. Again the lion turned as though to jump and be gone. He probably would have fared better had he done so. Also for a fleeting second, as I eased myself into a more advantageous position beside the branch, I thought I read a resolve in those lion eyes.

He stared straight through me and he moved his head and neck ever so slightly in my direction. His paws, bunched on the branches beneath, shifted ever so little as though he tested his balance for some effort. Instinctively I threw up my gloved hand before my face. What that lion equipment could do to my soft

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countenance as I hung helpless in the tree was awful to contemplate.

But to my companions below, none of these warning signs had been apparent.

"What are you saying to him, Frank?" they asked me with mock gravity.

"What's the lion saying to Frank, is the point," said Colcord with his characteristic chuckle. Frank had been in trees with lions many times himself. I think he appreciated the situation better than the others.

We stood for a long time then, tensed and ready, the lion and I. Neither of us made a move. I was afraid to and I think the lion felt the same way. I had a chance during this eternity to notice his face at close range. It was beautifully marked with a soft salmon color above and white along the muzzle. The top of the nose and around the ears shaded to black with gray flecks. The whiskers were long on each side of his cat nose and I could see the little pits where each whisker came out of the fur. This was as Frank Colcord would express it, "spitting distance."

My friends below the tree had grown silent. They were waiting. Even the dogs had quieted to an occasional bark. They waited too. It was up to me. With a motion as slow and steady as I could manage, I carefully slipped the coil of rope from my shoulder. With extreme slowness, so as not to precipitate any overt action on the part of my antagonist, I carefully dropped a loop along the branches and made it ready. It was an awkward position. I could not get the rope high enough to disengage it from the clawing branches. Also the limb on which I stood bent up and down in an uncertain way as I shifted my weight. Up to now I had been leaning my chest against the topmost branch. It was obvious I would have to get higher.

Laying the rope along the limb with the loop ready, I carefully hoisted myself to a sitting position on this topmost limb. In spite of my precautions, the top of the tree shook violently and the lion with it. Again he started toward me and emitted a snarl with his mouth wide open and all four of his capable canines showing clear to their roots. As he emitted this really terrifying noise, he rolled the lips back from all of his teeth as though to get them out of the way for imminent action. I froze in mid-

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movement. In another moment the lion's snarl faded to a hiss and the beast closed his mouth and licked off his cat lips with a rose-petal of a tongue. But the eyes never left mine. Those are the burning green eyes I will see in nightmares for the rest of my life.

With the same slow movement I reached behind me, probing for the rope. I found it with my fingers and pulled it tentatively. But it had caught again on some frustrating branch. I glanced behind me as best I could in the awkward position and shook the loop free of the twig that held it. The rope lay on top of the branch behind me now, and I coiled the remainder of the rope, ready for the throw. An upward and over motion so that the loop would spread as it fell, and I would have it around the neck and pulled tight before the lion could bite through. I tensed myself for the action. This had to be good.

I felt like a rookie baseball pitcher hurling his first big-league game. The lion turned his head ever so slightly. Some noise below. That was the time! I swung my arm up and over and the loop sailed true, over the entire head and foreshoulders. There was but a fraction of a second to see, for the lion had jumped. It was what my nerves and muscles had been expecting all along. Could I beat the swiftness of such an attack! Even as the rope was in midair, I had slid off of the limb and was falling feet foremost down through the tree. It was a desperate movement of self-preservation as the lion had jumped. I had shut my eyes like a child at a bloodcurdling movie.

But the terrifying cat had not jumped in my direction. If he had, this story would have been more fragmentary than it is. Instinctively as I fell, I kept hold of the rope. This and the bristling branches of the live oak kept me from going very far. I was aware even of being pulled upward and the rope was burning my hands through my gloves. A searing pain and something wet and hot on the back of my shoulder marked where some stiff branch had torn most of my shirt and a piece of skin away. The whole tree was shaking violently as though its solid roots were torn by an earthquake. But it was an earthquake of feline ferocity.

All the men below were yelling at once. I held desperately onto the rope as it burned through my hands and one of the slipping

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coils caught around my knuckles and held. My face was pulled violently against a mass of scratching branches and leaves. I struggled desperately, swinging on the rope, to find a purchase for my feet and to brace myself. Finally through the crashing of branches, the shouts made sense.

"Hold him, Frank, hold him! You've got him, boy! Hold on!"

Apparently I had the lion, or the lion had me. Just how all this had happened, wasn't at all clear.

In another moment, my swinging feet found one of the lower limbs. Then I got the crook of my knee over another, and I hung still. The jerking on the rope continued, but I could hold it better in that position. Only then did I see the lion. He was across the tree from me, a fortunate circumstance, for the poor beast was clawing and struggling in every direction like the revolving blades on some deadly mower. The rope noose that I had thrown so wildly was tightened firmly around the neck of the unfortunate animal, suspending him in midair. The lariat from the hanging lion led up on top of the tree over some intervening limbs and back to me. I had caught the lion indeed, or he had caught himself. In a few moments he would be choked to death like any common criminal, doing the gallows dance.

There were more wild shouts from down below. All of my friends were converging on the tree with ropes or fragments of ropes. Everyone was shouting orders and no one was executing them. In a moment the lion would be dead. I could see Frank Colcord's familiar black hat through the limbs below me. He was gesticulating wildly, and I finally divined his purpose, although the others all had different ideas and one of the cowboys was already beginning to climb the tree on the other side.

Pinning the rope which still threatened to jerk from my awkward grasp, I sought to let the dangling end down through the branches to where Frank stretched to reach it. I found the loop of the stiff lariat wound around one hand and biting deep into the flesh, although in the excitement I had not until that second realized the pain it was giving me. It had been that loop that had checked my fall through the spiny tree. I made a half turn of the loose end around a dead stub before my face and somehow got the rope off of my imprisoned hand. My fingers were numb

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and useless for a matter of moments and I was working against time.

The dangling end of contrary rope caught on every clump of twigs and leaves below me. The loose and spineless thing simply would not be pushed down through the openings in the branches. But in a moment it swung free and Colcord, with a prodigious jump, grasped the end of it and quickly knotted a piece of his own lariat in place.

"Now slack away, Frank, and make it quick!" he bawled at me up through the tree.

Again there was a fumbling eternity while I undid the half hitch and freed the rope from the limbs around me. Another man was helping Colcord below and they swiftly played out the slack to allow the lion to descend on the other side of the tree. I heard Frank say, "Now hold him right there," and he walked swiftly out of sight, beyond the branches. I knew they were tying up the lion as he still hung just out of reach of the ground. I quickly slid down out of the tree to get in on the last part of the excitement.

The long form of the dangling lion hung just clear of the ground. Only his tail, as it whipped back and forth, beat the dirt and leaves beneath the tree. Those giant paws and claws were still blindly raking the air, but more feebly now and with less regularity. I could hear the whistling rasp of the lion's breath as he sought with heaving lungs to drag some wisp of life-giving air past the rope on his throat.

Frank had already tied his hind paws together with one of the severed lariat ropes and had made doubly sure of the rope with an extra twist of baling wire. This was a new and obviously efficient use of baling wire, that panacea for all the ills on the western ranch. Keeping behind the dangling beast, the men had the forepaws of the lion also secured before I dropped from the lowermost branches of the tree.

Then came the gag, a piece of a stout oaken limb—one of the same that the lion himself had broken from the tree in his precipitous descent. This was jammed roughly back in his teeth. As the poor animal gasped with his mouth wide open, the gag was not particularly difficult. Another piece of baling wire was firmly twisted on one of the sticks, brought around back of the

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lion's head and wound around the other side of the gag. The lion was as secure as any villain tied up in a western thriller.

Frank motioned to the men on the other end of the rope to let out more slack. The trussed-up lion slowly slid to the ground and lay on his side. We loosened the noose where it had puckered the white lion throat into a series of reddened wrinkles. We all sat back and rested a moment. I began to feel abrasions and bruises that I had received in the tree, which I hadn't heretofore appreciated. The other men squatted on their bootheels and rolled cigarettes. Frank slapped the prone lion on the flank a time or two as though to stir him to life. From where we sat beside him, the cougar seemed dead. We could make out no faint stirring of that long body that would indicate that he drew breath. It seemed that it had been a lynching party after all.

But after the men's cigarettes were perhaps half smoked, there was a faint stirring in the lion form. The front and hind legs tightened together in a running motion and struggled for a moment against the binding ropes. I got up and walked around to the other side of the big cat so that I could see his face. The green eyes were wide open although the lion now lay still again. Those same eyes blazed forth a hate and malice even worse than when I had seen him in the tree. In spite of the broad daylight, those emerald eyes with the vertical slits seemed to shine with an interior illumination as though they could convey, with this awful intensity, some bodily harm to me. If I ever saw a curse, it was written in the lion eyes of the captive beast of the Catalinas.

"He's alive, Frank," I said with a mixture of relief and apprehension. "Look at his eyes."

But there was no need for the others to circle around and brave the lion's curse by looking into his eyes. The muscles of the beast rippled beneath his salmon-colored hide. His tail, the only unbound appendage on the captive's body, curled up from the ground like a thing alive in itself. There was a grating, splintering noise as the lion's jaws gnashed on the wooden gag in his mouth.

"Well, we did it," one of the men said behind me.

It seemed apparent that we had done it, as he had expressed it, although we had yet to make certain, even for ourselves, the exact reasons for all of this effort.

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We brought up one of the horses, my own in this particular case, as this sorrel animal had become so accustomed to lions on his back that perhaps he would not go to the trouble of noticing that this cat was alive. The horse stood docilely enough beneath the tree as we prepared to lift the now frantically struggling animal onto his back. I noticed as we gathered around the prone lion, that there seemed to be an abundance of helping hands on the tail end and none at all for the head.

If that oak gag should work loose for just one second—. Frank Colcord shrugged and heaved the head end himself. We carefully lifted the cougar high off the ground and onto the back of the horse from the rump end. As we laid the lion across the saddle, there was another convulsive bunching of feline muscles as he felt the new contact beneath him.

Even my placid lion horse that had carried in so many dead cats started involuntarily at the movement. He turned his ears around backward as though to catch some significant sound that might tell him what was going on on his back.

We carefully adjusted the lion so that his paws pointed backwards and upwards away from the horse. We tied the four paws together for good measure and wound the rope around the saddle horn and beneath the cinch on the horse's belly, to make sure. The head of the lion hung down on one side and his tail on the other. I don't believe I had fully appreciated the size of our captive until we were tying him on the horse. He was perhaps nine feet from his nose to his dangling tail, and a full-grown male of massive proportions. By his heft, as we raised him from the ground, I should estimate that he came close to two hundred pounds. He was a really magnificent animal, and, judging by his sharp canine teeth, in the prime of life. If we had wished to make a test of tying up a lion, we could have chosen no better a subject.

We were almost jocular as we swung out of the little valley where this drama had taken place. I led my horse carefully with many a backward glance to see that all was in order. We might yet have a tragedy and horseflesh is so soft, and those sharp claws were so close.

We had gone perhaps a half a mile when it happened. I had turned as usual to make certain that all was in order. There was a sudden yell behind me and the sharp thud of a horse's hoof in

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violent action. The reins were jerked from my hands like magic and I was half pulled around myself, by the violence of the movement. I got a candid-camera picture of my usually-docile horse in mid-air. He was in the process of making a violent buck which would have done credit to the most notorious animal in the chutes and corrals of the Tucson rodeo.

"Jump, Frank! He's loose!" yelled the cowboy who was riding behind me.

I skittered to the side like a frightened salamander, then peered cautiously from behind a little pine tree to view the situation. My horse, after the first plunging buck, had stood stock still. His forefeet were widespread and braced and his whole body trembled. I had seen a horse like this only once before, long ago when a livery stable caught fire and the animal was burned to death.

But the lion was still in the saddle. Apparently our packing job had been good enough, so that the cat was not thrown clear when my horse had gone into his act. The lion lay arched across the back of the horse apparently just as we had tied him.

But no, not quite. One massive hind foot, with the bunching muscles of the haunch, working violently, was striking and raking at the air above the horse's back. The lion with this one free foot seemed to be putting every ounce of his energy into the movement. Even as we watched the paw struck low over the horse's rump, only inches away from his twitching hide. The lion was at the same time violently striving to turn himself in his binding ropes so that his free foot could find a purchase below him. We watched horrified and helpless. If the lion's cat agility could accomplish that maneuver, I would lose a horse and probably a saddle into the bargain.

Frank Colcord, as usual, was the quickest to recover among us. He advanced toward the horse and the struggling lion, knotting a running loop into the good end of his lariat as he did so. He reached out and touched the neck of my horse and smoothed it with the assuring hand that only a real horseman can display. Keeping down and well clear of the wildly-striking lion, he paused for a moment with the small loop in his rope ready awaiting an opportunity. The lion paused only for a moment in his frantic gyrations and Frank flipped the small loop over that wild hind paw and jerked it snug. It was the work of a minute to

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pull the end of the rope beneath the saddle horn and loop it back, tight and secure, firmly against the other three legs. The lion lay quiet, as though this had been his final effort.

As we checked and adjusted all of the ropes again, I noticed with horror that there was a long clean scratch across the rump of my horse which in its mid-course had just broken through the skin to the red flesh beneath. The streak through the sorrel hair looked as though it had been done with the keenest knife. Apparently one claw of the lion's wildly-striking foot had raked home behind the saddle. No wonder my horse had gone into such a high-flying buck.

The cowboys were all joking about the incident. There is nothing that they quite enjoy so much as some form of excitement that had to do with horses. Even the ones who had lost bets on the venture seemed to feel that they had gotten their money's worth in the show. We trailed into the yard of the Bellote Ranch like a victorious Roman procession bringing back a notorious captive. All who had not had the good fortune or foresight to accompany us crowded around the lion bound on the horse. With many exclamations and with far more helping hands than we could possibly use, we gingerly lifted the lion from the saddle and carried him into an unused storage shed like a prisoner. Once again we went over the bonds, and especially the gag, with great care. There must be no slipping and at the same time, the ropes and wire should not be too tight so as to injure the animal or stop the circulation in his paws. All seemed to be well and we went into the ranch house to eat a well-deserved though very late lunch.

The meal was a festive affair and there was much talk and bravado. The only sour note in the assemblage was when some one raised the question as to what we were going to do with the lion now that we had him. No one seemed to have thought of this important question before.

Give him to a zoo? What zoo? And that would take a lot of letter writing and time, not to mention building a crate and the expense and trouble.

"Shoot him!" suggested Frank, with a flourish of his fork. The idea met with some approval among the ranch people. The thought somewhat sickened me, however, but I said nothing. It

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did seem that after the lion had been brought back in bonds like any other captive, that he ought to be given a fair trial.

I even suggested tentatively that we let him go in the morning. "We can have another lion chase out of it," I suggested weakly.

Two or three of the cowboys at the table turned on me with the expression which they usually reserve for eastern dudes when they reveal by their remarks that they are eastern dudes. All through the meal the talk varied as to the final disposition of our green-eyed captive in the little shed behind the ranch house. But we might have saved ourselves the trouble. A kindlier Providence made the decision for us.

The next morning, after the usual ranch breakfast of biscuits and beef, Frank Colcord and I went out to the shed to check on the lion. The long cat form with the drooping tail lay just as we had placed it the afternoon before. But there was no movement now; no twitching tail; no bunching of the muscles beneath the rope. I cautiously approached and after a moment laid my hand on his rump. The lion was quite cold and already stiff. I moved one of the great spreading paws to make sure. There was no doubt of it. The gallant beast with the green eyes had died some time during the night. We examined the ropes again and the gag. They were all as before. There was no mark on that whole lion body that would be a physical cause for death.

I think that this lion's spirit, untrammeled and free in the glorious rocks and live oak canyons of the Catalinas, simply could not be bound with human ropes. The stifling indignity of being a helpless captive in the hands of hated humans was too much for a thing of the wild to endure. I had seen wild horses this same way, with natures so free and restless that they could not stand captivity in any form. This lion of the Catalinas had a spirit as wild as any. That spirit had become free again some time during the night. Our ropes bound only his body.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN-EATER OF VANCOUVER

COUGAR KILLS SAILOR!" the headline screamed, and below in only slightly smaller print, the account continued: "Coat of Slain Man Only Clue. Hunt Organized on Vancouver Island for Killer."

I viewed these ominous words early in the year 1934 at a time when the place of the mountain lion in a human world was questionable indeed. On the many hunts during which we had followed lions under all conditions we had gradually assumed an attitude of contempt toward the cougar. The cowardly lioness of Copperas Canyon that had left her kittens in the face of danger, certainly did not display courage of any outstanding quality.

We had climbed into trees with other lions. We had approached close to them when they came to bay on the ground or on top of a rock. We had roped them, as in our adventure in the Catalina Mountains. Under all circumstances and at distances from two to ten feet we had poked and pestered lions and showered upon them every conceivable indignity. Under all of these circumstances, however, these cats had never once shown a really aggressive attitude toward us. Had there been a spark of the fighting spirit that makes up the wolverine or even the spotted bobcat, we would have been torn to ribbons on more than one occasion.

Every time we came to close quarters with a cougar, we treated him in the same way—with watchful alertness—as we would a set steel trap, but never with the respect that one would accord a real

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aggressive antagonist. Out of a hundred of such incidents an observer might well come to the conclusion that a mountain lion will not attack a human being. But there are some bloody and exciting exceptions to such a generality. A lion is still a lion and the cougars of the Northwest especially, have achieved a formidable reputation.

Vancouver Island and westernmost British Columbia, Canada, had been the scene of cougar attacks before the new headline caught my eye. Indeed, some of the most interesting and sinister stories of killer cougars have come from this territory. As early as 1898, a ferocious lion had leapt full in the face of a miner named J. Hanley near the town of Agassiz in the province of British Columbia. This place, although on the mainland, is within 35 miles of the city of Vancouver.

In this instance the miner, Hanley, had approached close beneath the tree where the lion crouched and emptied the full load of an old hammer shot gun full of grouse shot into the lion's countenance. The lion, with one eye shot out and obviously resenting the indignity, jumped upon the audacious miner with murderous intent. A single bull terrier dog which had originally treed the cougar, entered the fray to divert the attack of the lion. With this courageous dog fastened to the throat of the cat, Hanley managed to bludgeon the cougar to death with the splintered stock of his useless shotgun.

Both dog and Hanley were badly cut and bleeding from the encounter and it was questionable for a few days if either was going to survive the lion. Both recovered however, to tell of the lion attack and to acquire more caution in the future as to attacking lions with grouse shot. Also, as the treed cougar had been aggravated and wounded, the general opinion was that "any critter would fight if you cornered 'em."

A few years later, on September 23, 1916, another lion made bloody history in the same Vancouver area. This killer cat stalked and attacked two children near the settlement of Cowichan Lake on Vancouver Island. These children, Doreen Ashburnham, 11 years old, and Anthony Farrer, 8 years old, had set out together to catch their ponies pastured in a meadow about one half mile from their house at Cowichan Lake. The land was only sparsely

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wooded, as even at that time large numbers of trees had been cut and the land cleared for farms. In the lush wetness of the Northwest climate, however, there had spread into these clearings a dense growth of fern bracken and high grass.

Out of the shadows of one of these fern clumps the lion sprang upon Doreen from the side and behind. The slinking cat had apparently been stalking the children and made the rush and spring in the conventional manner of the hunting lion. The fury and weight of the cougar bore the little girl to the ground where she lay on her face in the trail with the lion holding her down with his forepaws.

Anthony Farrer was made of the stern stuff that had brought the pioneers to these Northwest lands. The little lad called to the girl to lie still and leaped astride the cougar's back with his knees bent and his bridle swinging. The fury of this attack in turn overbalanced the victorious cat and he fell away from the prostrate girl.

As Doreen scrambled to her feet, the lion lashed viciously at Anthony with his forepaw and struck the lad in the side of the face. The awful claws laid open the boy's cheek and the force of the blow knocked him sprawling on the ground where he rolled over trying to protect his face and neck with his arms. At the same time, the spunky lad called to Doreen to run for her life.

Instead of fleeing, however, the girl in her turn attacked the lion. The big cat was mauling the prostrate boy, mouthing his scalp and tearing at his shoulders and arms. Doreen Ashburnham, although terrified herself and all but helpless, beat frantically at the head and face of the cougar with the pony bridle which she held in her hand. Again and again she swung the iron bit of the bridle against the nose and eyes of the clawing cat which continued to attack the prostrate boy. As the lion half turned toward this new onslaught, the girl, Doreen, with a show of courage of which few war heroes could boast, wilfully forced her bare right hand and arm into the snarling creature's half-open mouth.

The suddenness of the move caught the lion by surprise but he clamped his naked teeth into the soft white flesh of Doreen's forearm as deep as her hand in his throat would allow. At the same time she beat the lion over the face and neck with the bridle in her left hand. With a sudden scream of fear, the cougar

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jerked away and bounded into the ferns from which it had come.

Doreen was a heroine, though a bloody one with a badly lacerated arm. Anthony had a severe cut on his head as well as the conviction that he had a loyal feminine partner. The Department of the Secretary of State of Canada announced the awarding of the Albert Medal of the second class to both of the children for unusual acts of bravery. There were none who questioned the appropriateness of the medals.

Charles March, a local homesteader and hunter, caught the killer cougar a few days later. He found a thin and gaunt lion, almost blind and obviously starving. The emaciated animal was a pathetic figure for a villain's role.

Every dude-wrangler in the western woods uses the mountain lion as part of his stock in trade to render the dark mountain shadows more terrifying. "Did you hear that scream? That's a hunting cougar up there. We had all best sleep close to the fire tonight." The occasional stories such as the terrible attack on the two children of Vancouver Island lend abundant credence to this fear.

Cougars really ought to be dangerous. After all, they are not so much smaller than African lions. Blood-chilling tales of cata-mounts and cougars were the repertoire of every backwoodsman. The more modern movies have carried on the legends of the killer instincts of the cougar, simply as the solidified celluloid versions of this same Americana. In many a thriller the terrifying lion skulks and leaps upon his victim from some high branch or overhanging ledge. It matters little that the mountain lion seldom, if ever, makes a kill that way.

There is still considerable question as to whether the mountain lion screams at all. Several reputable hunters have told me that they were certain that the cougar had neither the power nor the inclination to make the screams that were attributed to him. Other men were just as certain that the mountain lion did scream, although most of these asserted that this was apparently in the mating season and not for the supposed purpose of terrifying an intended victim.

The upshot of all of these trends has been that a series of legends has grown up around the mountain lion. There were certain ways in which the cougar was supposed to act, but rather

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few real eye witness accounts to support these contentions. What was the truth, then, of the deadliness of the American lion toward men. Could I find some real instances where lions had attacked humans, especially any that might have been unprovoked? With this thought in mind I made every effort to trace down the Man-Eater of Vancouver.

Vancouver Island had always been a hotbed of mountain lion incidents. This huge island in extreme western Canada is heavily wooded and even today little-traveled except in the few spots where civilization has made a foothold. Even though this area is near the northern range of the American cougar, the wet spruce forests and fir thickets of this coastal island seem ideal for lions and their ways. In addition to the well-authenticated attack at Cowichan Lake, there was a vague report of a cougar leaping on a full-grown woman on the very outskirts of the town of Victoria.

The woman was a school teacher and was going to and from her classes when the skulking cougar attacked her from behind and lacerated her head and shoulders wickedly with his teeth and claws. A decade later, a similar occurrence was reported in the southern part of this same Vancouver Island.

This time a child was attacked—a girl of twelve. She had been walking near her father's cabin and the lion had leapt upon her unprovoked and without warning from the midst of a dense clump of young trees. This poor girl had her arm severely bitten, but that was all. She was most fortunate.

There were several other such accounts of which I could gain only the haziest detail. Fishermen on the seaward side of Vancouver Island told of full-grown lions leaping in their windows at night and stalking on padded feet around the room while they cowered in terror in one corner. Lumbermen cruising the rich fir forests of Vancouver Island not infrequently saw lions that appeared to be following them, although so far as I know none of these timber cruisers were actually ever attacked.

The remarkable thing about all of these Vancouver incidents was the fact that no one was killed. Neither the school teacher nor the little girl nor the other vague accounts made mention of actual death. To any lion hunter who has passed a thousand carcasses of deer, cleanly killed by the raking claws and crunching canines of cougars, the absence of human death in the Vancouver

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matter seems remarkable. A puny and soft-skinned human would be an easy kill for any cougar if that was what he was trying to do.

The increasingly sinister reputation of the cougars of Vancouver Island was climaxed in 1934 by an apparent fatality. A mountain lion was treed and caught on the western side of the island. The stomach of the beast, upon examination, was found to contain fragments of heavy blue cloth and two round buttons with the outline of an anchor engraved upon them. These pathetic remnants were undoubtedly the remains of a sailor's pea-jacket of a conventional variety. The evidence could only indicate that some seagoing man had been slain and eaten by a cougar.

The news was received, not only with the usual newspaper furbelow, but also with a tremor of apprehension throughout the settlements on Vancouver Island and the mainland as well. Isolated schools were closed. Small children no longer played in the edges of the clearings surrounding their cabins. Cutters of pulp-wood and sawlogs wore guns at their belts and glanced furtively around them at the snap of a twig. The workmen at Nanaimo added an armed guard to their detail who stood watch with a rifle over the crook of his elbow while they worked in the woods. Even on the Olympic Peninsula in the State of Washington, the lion hysteria spread. There were cougars there too, but few people had seen them and even fewer had ever caught any. But the fear and terror inspired by the bloody happenings on Vancouver Island, only a short distance to the north, seemed enough. Few Indian uprisings of earlier years had caused greater apprehension. The scattered human inhabitants of these wild regions felt themselves surrounded by an unseen but deadly enemy.

Especially in the town of Victoria on the Canadian side of the border, a war against the cougars was instituted with all of the fanfare and enthusiasm of recruiting to resist an enemy invasion. Parties of armed men, led by one woodsman or hunter as a guide, set out to exterminate any lions they could find. There were few lion hounds on Vancouver Island at the time, so that most of these forays were simply armed bravado. Even with dogs, the forested mountains of the Vancouver area are so heavily overgrown that it is extremely difficult to trail lions there.

The country is so vast and the use of horses so difficult, that it

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is a virtual impossibility to keep up with fast dogs. But these posses of lion hunters set out nonetheless to scour the surrounding mountain sides. I talked to some of these men later on. Most of them thought that they were looking for the lion that had foully murdered an unknown sailor. But if the cougar already killed had the remains of a seaman's jacket in his stomach, then the murder was already avenged. This bit of reasoning seems to have bothered few of these good people who set out lion-hunting in those troubled months during the period of the hysteria.

Several of the outstanding business institutions offered large rewards for the skins of the killer lions. Many newspapers in the country carried accounts of the cougar scare on the Northwest Coast. The stories, as they passed from place to place and from mouth to mouth, grew more bloody and terrifying with each re-telling. I presume that the populace of both the United States and Canada was weary of tales of depression and economic crises. A rousing good lion yarn with flying claw and slashing tooth was a welcome respite from the ordinary run of news. The more blood-curdling the account the better it was received. After all these were lions, weren't they? And lions by common acceptance are killers, prowlers by night and cowards striking defenseless women and lonely wayfarers without warning.

There is also a common bond among men when they set out against a single enemy. There is a certain esprit-de-corps felt even by people of scattered communities such as those on Vancouver Island. Men set out with joy and enthusiasm against a common enemy, not by any particular urge to destroy this enemy, but simply because of some mass psychology, some crowd pleasure which they derived from shouldering rifles and setting off together. This is the stuff of which lynching mobs are made. This is the kind of thing that sends many a man off to the wars without he, himself, knowing quite why he went.

It seemed significant to me, as I examined the Vancouver outbreak, that no one knew who the dead sailor was or for that matter seemed to care particularly. It was obvious that an unknown man had been murdered by a cougar; therefore war had been declared. There were many who stoutly avowed over their beer and ale "that every damned lion in the Northwest would be cleaned out." It is fortunate that the devil's club and brush of

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Vancouver Island were so impenetrably thick. It is fortunate too that man's resolves often fly far in advance of his accomplishments. As far as I could ascertain later, only three cougars were bagged during this offensive.

It was weeks later that a nondescript little mariner came into the sheriff's office and asked if he might see the evidences of the coat fragments and the sailor's buttons. Upon being shown the awful evidence, the little man declared quite calmly that the coat had belonged to him and that he himself was quite alive and well.

"The dawgone thing was so soaked with whale oil that I threw it out in the brush behind the shack. Must have been that rank whale oil that attracted your lion."

The little seaman disappeared with a grin. He was not a welcome man. He had really spoiled a good story. The place on the west coast of Vancouver Island where the lion had been killed was so close to the shack of the sailor who had owned the oil-soaked jacket that the case seemed closed. By this time also the flare of enthusiasm which had organized armed bands of hunting men had died as these things do. Only vaguely persistent still was the feeling throughout the northwest territory that cougars were deadly, slinking murderers and should be exterminated.

The Vancouver lion outbreak is not unique. It was especially interesting because it was possible to trace down most of the facts and ascertain with some clarity exactly how these incidents had followed one another. But in the main outlines the Vancouver happenings have been duplicated a dozen times in North America since European colonization began. Catamounts, as they were called, achieved a sinister reputation in Pennsylvania and the Ohio lands practically as soon as Europeans moved in. There are early accounts of lions making the settlements unsafe in Missouri and farther west in Colorado. The newspaper, the *Denver Post*, has for many years offered a bounty for any lion skin which had been taken within the state.

Nor do all of the bloodthirsty lions live on Vancouver Island. Colorado, Idaho, California, New Mexico have all added some incidents to the score against cougars. Typical is the attack which took place in early October, 1909 near Flagstaff, Arizona. Two children, the son and daughter of an itinerant logger named Fair-

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way, working in a camp south of Flagstaff, were wilfully attacked.

The boy and girl were on their way to school early on a crisp fall morning. The two unfortunates never arrived at school that day nor for many days thereafter. When they did not return in the evening, their distracted father retraced their route to the school to look for them. He found the pair only a few yards apart, lying on the trail.

The girl, a youngster of some nine years, had apparently been attacked first and her side and shoulder had been clawed and chewed unmercifully.

The boy, two years younger, had been attacked as well and sprawled a few yards away with his little lunchbox still clutched in his hand. The lion had bitten him behind the shoulder and clawed the back of the head as he ran. Although both children were unconscious and had lost much blood, neither succumbed to the attack. The girl, however, had lost most of one ear to remind her through life of a close escape from a killer lion.

The lion that stalked the Fairway children was not tracked down for some weeks and there was considerable doubt as to whether the real culprit was ever caught at all. Indeed the whole incident seemed to arouse no particular animosity at the time. Ranchers and hunters who had been trailing lions went on hunting and killing them. Those who cut lumber or raised cattle, continued to do just that. In this section, the Indian wars had been so recently over, that a killer lion was simply regarded as another one of the normal hazards of the disappearing frontier. Rattlesnakes and lions should be killed whenever and wherever found, but no particular effort was necessary to hunt them down.

This does not exhaust, by any means, the mountain lion incidents that have pock-marked American history as the frontier has moved westward. On an average of about once a year a cougar attacks or tries to attack a human. The bulk of these seemed to be children or women, isolated or walking through secluded and lonely places, close to lion haunts. Such an observation certainly does not argue well for the cougar.

But there are other accounts of lions attacking full-grown men, and in one case near Uvalde, Texas, a lion attacked three men together and escaped. It makes some difference where the investigator might make his inquiry. Certain of the people of

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Vancouver Island with long memories might give a very dire account indeed of the mountain lion's relation to human beings. Professional lion hunters usually have the utmost contempt for any suggestion that mountain lions might be dangerous to them.

Of the thousands of lions that have watched cowboys jog past on the trails below, fishermen, picnickers and hunters, there have been a bare handful that ever made any aggressive move toward these unsuspecting people. We found, for example, where the gigantic male lion that we called Old Man Sandia, had sat down in the snow and watched a whole group of skiers go through their inexplicable maneuvers. Several times on our other lion trails, we found indubitable evidence that the lion had been watching us for a long time before we saw him. Always they seemed piqued by curiosity rather than by any ferocity or malicious intent.

Upon carefully gathering all of the accounts and stories of lion murders, there are several facts that stand out by themselves.

The first and most disappointing is the vagueness of these reports. Many of them are legends rather than actual accounts of lion kills.

The other inescapable conclusion is certainly that hunting lions very rarely and only under exceptional circumstances attack a human being. And in those instances where lions do attack humans, they apparently do it half-heartedly and seldom eat human flesh. Many hunters have remarked that human meat is notoriously unpalatable to wild carnivores.

However, this might be, in many cases lions seem to have attacked humans for reasons other than eating them. Some of these were undoubtedly instances of frantic fear and hysterical defense. A human suddenly surprising a lion at close quarters may be lacerated by the frantic beast as an escape measure. Certainly a full grown cougar, if he really set out to kill a human, could do so as cleanly and effectively as a deer. The fact that so many of the people attacked by lions were merely lacerated or scratched, appears significant.

The lion that ate the whale-oil-soaked sailor's jacket on Vancouver Island was an old lion with blunted teeth. The lion that attacked the two school children near Flagstaff, Arizona, was also later caught—at least the hunters were certain that they had the

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particular beast that had done the deed. This also was an old cougar, haggard and gaunt from hunger. This may be significant.

Perhaps a hunting lion, unable to catch the fleet-footed deer—his normal food—might turn as a measure of desperation to the hunting down of humans. Of all of the creatures in the woods, man, the porcupine and the skunk are the slowest of foot. The porcupine is armored with quills and a lethal, point-studded tail that might prove deadly to an old cougar whose quickness and skill has gone with his youth. Skunks are odoriferously unpleasant. But the man-thing that walks through the mountain trails has muted ears and cannot smell at all. This is the easiest prey for the meat-eater. It seems remarkable that lions in desperate circumstances have not hit upon this solution oftener than has been the case.

Cougars are very rarely seen by humans, even by men who live in isolated ranches and habitually travel through the wild mountain and canyon country that the lions call home. There is something nocturnal in all cats. The mountain lion is no exception. Just as the apartment dweller puts out his cat at night to prowl the alleys and deserted streets, the cougar sets forth in the twilight for the greater part of his traveling. Even the African lion habitually stalks and kills by night and rests by day. It is not that a lion is any less efficient in broad daylight; they can see as well and handle themselves as well under the full glare of the sun as in any crepuscular shade.

But the cats, all of them, are lovers of the shadows. Even those kings, the Bengal tigers of Asia and the African lion, make this concession to their furtive cat background. We found that the mountain lions which we raised as pets spurned the daylight and loved the darkness like all of the their kind. It is this furtive slinking by shadow that has made the lion seem more dangerous to humans. Night terrors are always magnified in the minds of men because we humans are day dwellers and do not habitually seek the dark. On many of our lion hunts we found ample evidence that these mountain cats could and did move about at any time of the day and even hunt and eat in full light.

But they made their longest trips by night. Almost all of the tracks that we followed, which were fresh, proved to be those of a cougar who had walked that way the night before. I think that

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this nocturnal nature of the cats is a concomitant of the rest of their furtiveness. Faint light and darkness is a protection which augments their powers. At the same time the shadows give them concealment from intended victims that might become food.

I know of only one instance, however, in which a lion attacked a human being by night. All of the other assaults were at least by half-light in morning and evening. The instance of the attack by night took place between Cook City in Montana and Yellowstone Park. A full-grown cougar jumped upon this traveler in the manner of a lion making a kill. The springing cougar sank his claws into the man's shoulder as its leap carried the cat onto the rump of the horse the man was riding. The scream of pain which the fellow emitted as the lion's claws sank into his flesh, seemed to terrify the would-be killer as much as the victim. It appeared that the lion had sprung upon the man's horse to make a kill and had not noticed that the man was in the saddle until he had actually made his spring.

Just as cats are nocturnal by nature, they are curious also. Curiosity killed a cat is an adage as old as Roman times when domestic cats were first introduced from Egypt. Curiosity has killed cats, and it has killed many a cougar as well. There is in the make-up of the furtive, vicious, wilful and unpredictable mountain lion a strain of curiosity, especially in his relation with human beings. There are many stories of naturalists, woodsmen and hunters being followed by cougars, especially in snow where they could check their own tracks and those of their pursuer. Many a cougar scare has been started in this manner. Round lion tracks following those of men do give the pursued a creepy feeling of insecurity, but in most cases if the human that is followed had not happened to double on his tracks or otherwise accidentally discover the lion behind him, he would be quite unaware that he had ever been observed at all.

A certain mountain lion on a certain day several years ago acted in just this same manner. The impression which I gained from the experience, was so nerve-tingling that it still is recorded in my own mind as one of the most vivid recollections of wild animals in their native haunts. Then too, this circumstance of being followed by a lion gives a keener impression of the real nature of these wild beasts than any cougars harried by hunters and flee-

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ing before dogs. Undoubtedly in most of the pursuits in which I had taken part, the unfortunate lion ahead of us was acting unnaturally in an unpredictable wave of hypertension and fear. But following lonely hunters in the woods is the lion's own idea.

I was followed in the Pecos country of New Mexico. These are the forested mountains and towering naked peaks of perhaps the most rugged mountain mass in the whole Southwest. Here the famous Pecos River is born from the many trickling trout streams and glacial cirques of the high country. In this series of mountains, seamed and crevassed with canyons and valleys, big and small, all manner of wild game finds sanctuary. Even this far south there are elk in great numbers as well as deer, bear, turkeys and of course the cougar to make the picture complete.

On this occasion I was hunting elk, although none too successfully. An early November snow made a white background for the opening of the hunting season. The day was cold and brisk and might have been a typical bit of midwinter in any of the lower country. The elk were furtive and hard to find. In spite of their great bulk they had the faculty of slipping almost unheard through the dense stands of fir and spruce that surrounded the little glades and open meadows.

But it was not this natural caution of the elk that had started off that particular morning so wrong. It was another hunter. This character (I had perceived but a glimpse of him through the low-hanging trees) had a red coat and high pitched voice. He was telling some one off to his left in a stage whisper that I could hear a hundred yards away "them elk are just ahead." I knew that the elk were just ahead; I had been stalking them since it was light enough to see. I judged from the sign that there were thirty or forty animals herded together. In such an accumulation of Pecos elk there would be one or two antlered heads that any hunter would thrill to see.

The elk were in an open glade ahead, but screened by the thick boles of trees and heavy bushes that grew on the edge of the opening. I had heard the heavy animals shifting in the undergrowth just before this despicable stranger sounded off in his high-pitched whisper. There was a sudden stillness. The vague noises of heavy bodies had stopped. I no longer could hear the muffled sounds

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that the elk herd made as it fed. I knew that every fan-like ear was rigid and distended, straining in our direction.

Suddenly there was the wild galloping of hoofs. A shot rang out off to the left and then another which brought twigs and small branches raining down to the forest floor. Those nimrods couldn't see the animals any better than I could. I cursed under my breath as I sprinted forward in the forlorn hope of catching a clear view of the fleeing elk. If only they hadn't shot. With that noise behind them those elk would run for ten miles and I didn't know of any other herd in that whole part of the Pecos country.

It was in this aggravating way that I happened to be following the trampled snow behind an elk herd in a particularly unreceptive mood. I walked swiftly along through the light snow, still so angered and disgruntled that I did not perceive all of the things around me that I should have. There was no particular need for caution, as the widespread hoof-marks of the herd indicated all too clearly that they were running still. I snapped off twigs with scarcely a shrug of my shoulders and sought only to make as much speed as possible, though whether to overtake the fleeing elk or to widen the gap between the contemptible hunters and myself, I did not know.

I must have followed the elk for two hours or more in this precipitous manner. The herd had split and I had singled out three animals, which from their tracks should be bulls, and one a big one. As the animals were walking I went more slowly myself and tried to avoid the little mounds of snow concealing sticks that might betray my presence. I bent forward now, straining ahead to perceive by any slight movement or sound the presence of the bull elk. I knew that the wily animals would stop and listen and look back on their own trail for sights and sounds of pursuit.

But if I was cautious, I might glimpse them across a canyon, or see the outline of a dun-colored body between the dark trees ahead. So I tip-toed and slunk along, like any carnivore animal myself, crouching for a kill. The interminable elk tracks wound through the trees and around the little clearings on and on to the north. I crouched low in one spot to sight beneath a tree clump that grew on a knoll. As I did so I cocked my head to the side.

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Was it a sound that had caught my attention? The woods were as still as death. Not a chipmunk stirred, not a jaybird fluttered in that whole mountain scene. I glanced back over my shoulder. There was nothing, only the empty woods behind and around me. I made a mental note of the position of Lake Peak off to my left in case it should start to snow and I should lose direction. I started on, then stopped in mid-stride. There was something behind me. I whirled around angry. Those damnable hunters were following me in the snow to spoil another chance at the elk.

But there was nothing,—the white snow, the black tree trunks, absolutely nothing. Only the tip of a small bush back there stirred in the wind. But there was no wind! Not a breath. I stared at the thing fascinated as though I expected the feathered head of a wild Indian to rise from behind the bush. There was a suggestion of a dark shape that blended with the bare stems and dead wood of the bush. It might be a man on his hands and knees, or it might be the end of a dead aspen log protruding from the snow. But the bush had moved.

I stared long at the suspicious darkness in the verdure behind me. Nothing stirred. No squirrel chittered. I shrugged my shoulders and turned again along the elk tracks.

It must have been noon by now, although the sun was an indefinite blurred center of light behind a low-gray cloud pall that threatened imminent snow. Perhaps I was getting too far up in the country, and I was on foot. But then over the next little ridge, across that next clearing I might see them. I looked at the elk track again—the big one—and I went on. I went perhaps another mile in the same quiet fashion, tip-toeing through the forest to catch the elk unaware. But as I went I found myself glancing constantly behind. There were no sounds to warrant this caution, and I had really seen nothing. But gradually the conviction was seizing me that I was being followed. Something else, or some one else, was following those same elk.

"They certainly are being mysterious about it," I thought to myself. "Well, they can have them."

It must have been by that time five or six miles from my camp near Beatty's cabin. If I did get an elk, I couldn't pack it back that far.

With a mixture of fatigue and disappointment I turned from

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the elk trail and slanted down the top of a hogback ridge in the direction from which I had come. I chose easy going and a direct route. I might come upon a deer on the way back. After a half hour of brisk walking, the sky seemed to lighten a bit, as though the threat of snow wasn't so pressing after all. I brushed the snow from a fallen log and sat down for a moment to contemplate a ruined morning. I unwrapped a candy bar and crumpled the paper at my feet.

I raised the thing to my mouth, then froze again in mid-motion with the same vague feeling of uneasiness that I had felt before. I had heard something. It was a faint brushing sound as though a man had rubbed a glove over rough tree bark. It was a vague noise but in that quiet stillness, I certainly had heard it. It was not imagination. I stuffed the candy bar uneaten into my pocket, and stood up. I looked around me and back along the way I had come. The sound was not repeated. I could make out no form or movement. If there had only been a wind, it could have been two trees rubbing together.

But no breath stirred; not the slightest. It was still as death in that Pecos forest. I found myself clutching my rifle apprehensively, though what there was to fear I am sure I do not know. I started back up the ridge, looking among and even up into the trees to find the source of my annoyance. It wasn't really the sound that had bothered me, it was a feeling—a certainty that something was behind me. That something moved when I moved, silently or almost so, and always behind.

With the rifle in a ready position before me, I started back up the ridge. The surface of the snow was unbroken, except where my own dark footprints had come down through it a few moments before. I went a hundred feet back along my own trail, scanning the surface of the snow for any sign of a disturbance. After all, everything that moves in the woods must make some kind of track. I went a little farther and stepped back over a snow-covered log that I had crossed on my way down the ridge. There were my own tracks, and beside them clean, fresh in the snow were others!

These new prints were round and animal-like. They led down along my own foot prints, then crossed them and bunched together behind the fallen log. Lion tracks! The hair on the back

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of my neck stirred vaguely with some primeval tingling sensation, felt but rarely. I swung the rifle in a half-arc around the woods before me. No tawny form crouched there. I saw no green cat eyes or lashing tail. The round cat prints led along the side of the log to my right and off down the curve of the slope.

That lion had been there seconds before, but had slunk away when I doubled on my track. I breathed quickly with the sudden realization that I had been holding my breath. The lion was gone and I was distinctly glad that he had.

My return through the woods back to camp was a swift journey. I glanced behind as frequently as ahead, but saw nothing as I had seen nothing before. The feeling of being followed had disappeared, however. I was certain that the cat-thing was no longer behind me. My companions at camp were inclined to scoff at my recital of a lost herd of elk and a mysterious lion that followed men.

But other lion hunters to whom I have recounted this experience of being followed are more sympathetic. These men have told me that they too have been followed by lions, seemingly without purpose and from an urge of sheer curiosity. But whether curiosity or not, the realization that a full-grown mountain lion is silently following behind is a tingling experience indeed. It adds spice to the woods.

Whether followed or following, however, the American mountain lion has proven himself a fascinating, terrifying, and sometimes lovable cat. He is the prince of all of our cats, and, I think, the king of American game.

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Frank C. Hibben

Author of *THE LOST AMERICANS*

Magnificent gravure illustrations.
by PAUL BRANSOM

Today, only in the rugged mountains of the West, in Central Mexico, and the rank fastnesses of the Florida Everglades do the big cats still stalk their prey. In 1934 the Southwestern Conservation League commissioned Frank C. Hibben to find out all he could about the habits of these fast-disappearing American animals, and in this thrilling book Mr. Hibben tells what he learned about the most exciting hunting America offers the sportsman.

He tells of an extraordinary expedition made with the eighty-year-old veteran lion hunter, Ben Lilly, who once tracked a big cat to his kill over pine needles unaided by any dog. He tells of a hunt in the Mogollon Mountains of New Mexico where the cougar poised at bay at the edge of a thousand-foot drop and then sprang away over a route neither dog nor man could follow. He tells of the time when, while pursuing a lion over the Tonto Rim in Arizona, he discovered a hitherto unknown arrow cave of prehistoric man.

In this stirring account, the author transmits the thrill of the headlong chase over dangerous country, the triumph of the moment when the cat is finally treed, the elemental savagery of the dogs' attack on the dead carcass. You will find out, as Frank Hibben did, many curious facts

about the mountain lion—who can run more swiftly and kill more surely than any other American animal, yet be held at bay by a pack of dogs; who rarely attacks human beings or even range animals and yet relishes such unappetizing morsels as the spiky porcupine or the odoriferous skunk. You will find out how the cougar lives, eats, and breeds, and you will learn from the most expert hunters of the Southwest how best to start, track, and tree the big cat. You will grow fond, as the author did, of the lion hound, indispensable to all hunters, who must have a "nose as delicate as a French connoisseur and a constitution like a Roman soldier."

Here is a book for sportsmen everywhere, whether of the armchair or active variety; thrilling to read, beautiful to own.

FRANK C. HIBBEN has a multitude of interests, of which lion hunting is only one. He is a cattleman, an expert on game management, and professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico. He has been on many archaeological expeditions for this and other universities and museums since his graduation from Princeton in 1933. He earned his M.A. at the University of New Mexico and his Ph.D. at Harvard. In 1942 he entered the armed services, serving first as a captain in the Army Air Forces and later as a lieutenant commander in the Navy. His first book, *The Lost Americans*, tells of the discovery of the existence of ancient man, who roamed our western plains during the Ice Age.

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